

**How far can it be argued that Mary Seacole  
has been an influential figure in terms of  
relations between the races and pioneering  
in the Crimean War in her own time and  
beyond?**



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# Introduction:

## Why I chose my question:

*Aol - Justification (2)*

I selected my topic question because, although black history is becoming focused on more by schools, for decades white history has dominated young minds, and has therefore stuck with them throughout their lives. Personally, I chose to do this project because I want to expand my knowledge on Black History - I am intrigued and fascinated by the topic and I wish to understand more regarding it.

Mary Seacole, a Jamaican, mixed-race historically significant figure, was primarily forgotten about after passing away in 1881; many believe this was due to her ethnicity, as her actions during the Crimean War were incredibly inspirational and should not have been lost in history.

I predominantly chose to base my project around Mary Seacole as I believe that she deserves to be more well-known on account of her being a determined, courageous, and strong woman who went against the racial beliefs of the Victorian Era's society to help wounded soldiers in the Crimean War (1853-1856). Additionally, Seacole was an important individual because of her contribution to pioneering.

## The Main Points I'd like to cover:

*Aol - objectives  
(clear + specific)*

Throughout this essay, the main points I intend on addressing include: Seacole's major achievements and how she attained them; I will focus mainly on her accomplishments during the Crimean War, as that is what my question displays. Furthermore, I will focus on why she was 'forgotten' for years and the possible reasons for this. As I explore these points, I will demonstrate what (English) society was like during the 1800's for people of colour, which will link into Seacole's struggles whilst attempting to aid/help throughout the war.

## Type of Research:

I have mainly used secondary rather than **primary research** as I believe that it is more useful, and it is most likely factually correct as I have mainly used popular history-based websites.

Originally, I was, as evidently written in my activity log (29/11/23), going to conduct a survey between family/friends to determine how known Seacole and her contributions to the war were, however I've realised it would be bias - I've told my family about this project and my friends would have learnt about her (alongside myself) in school - this small introduction to Seacole ignited my interest in her.



# Research Review:

## Assortment of Sources/Methods:

*Abz Variety of Sources (2)*

In this section, I'll be discussing and reviewing the variety of sources I used for my research (along with my findings) and their reliability. I've used a range of sources, some of which include: books, websites, journal entries and paintings. As previously mentioned (briefly) in my introduction, I mostly used **secondary research** rather than primary research as I feel that it's sometimes easier to understand and use - furthermore, there weren't many primary resources to use. One reason for this is that Mary Seacole, despite being a public figure, didn't have many books/articles written about her and only had a few pictures taken; despite this, I've still used minimal primary research (including a written account).

## My Findings:

The first book I retrieved information from<sup>1</sup> displayed various aspects of Seacole's life, including her upbringing and experiences with racism as an adult, her struggles that she overcame, and her importance to society. Furthermore, it highlights her perseverance whilst creating her own business and pioneering near the battlefield in Kadokoi: 1855. The details of the book were laid out in clear sections, with illustrated pictures that corresponded to the information. This secondary source is reliable as Izzi Howell has written 50+ books, which include many history-based publications. This demonstrates that Howell is dependable as she has experience in thorough research - for her books to be factually correct.

*NOT relevant  
considering  
12.*

The second book I used<sup>2</sup> only had a small amount of information concerning her, as it was about many inspirational black women in history. However, I still gathered useful knowledge; The information provided was mainly about Seacole's contributions in Crimea and how she assisted the soldiers with medical support, along with her being **impecunious**. As there was only one page written about her, it was set into some paragraphs and a title. I think the reliability of this source is good, considering the author is passionate about writing factual books for a younger audience, enabling them to gain useful knowledge.

One primary resource I used for research was Seacole's book<sup>3</sup>. Using google scholar, I discovered an edited version with notes from an English Professor. After skimming through, the main aspect I focused on was the editor's comment (before the book begins) which stated that Seacole was 'rapidly obscured from view by Nightingale's candle'. This source is exceedingly reliable as Seacole, the focus of my project, wrote it herself.

Another book I used as a resource<sup>4</sup> was written about Mary Seacole and her nickname: Mother Seacole. It focuses on how she felt about it and how it was used at the time. There

<sup>1</sup> Howell, Izzi Mary Seacole (2016)

<sup>2</sup> Harrison, Vashti Bold Women in Black History (2017)

<sup>3</sup> Seacole, Mary Wonderful adventures of Mrs Seacole in Many Lands (1857):

<sup>4</sup> Fluhr, Nicole "THEIR CALLING ME 'MOTHER' WAS NOT. I THINK ALTOGETHER UNMEANING": MARY SEACOLE'S MATERNAL PERSONAE (2006)

are lots of quotes in this book which demonstrate good research. I believe that this source is reliable because it was published by Cambridge University Press which is a highly renowned establishment.

The last book I used for research was<sup>5</sup>, contrastingly, exhibiting facts about Florence Nightingale. I used this source because I'm incorporating Nightingale into my counter argument - she's also described as nursing soldiers in the Crimean War (similar to Seacole). Although, Nightingale was given more credit and is remembered now for her actions far more than Seacole. This book is extremely reliable, as Stewart Ross is described as 'one of Britain's most **versatile** and popular writers' which spotlights the sheer admiration he receives, along with his commitment to writing. He's won awards such as the Benjamin Franklin Prize, and has held many titles throughout his career.

A03  
support and  
Alternatives  
(2)

The first website I used was a biography.<sup>6</sup> One point I liked was that after Seacole was a **sutler** in the war and wrote her novel, a festival was held for her after the book became a bestseller. The secondary source also evidenced that in London at the time of the war (1854) it was publicly known that there was a lack of necessities/nursing. This ultimately encouraged Seacole to volunteer and help. The website also talked about the Crimean war, explaining that there were 500,000+ casualties. The dependability and trustworthiness of this website is very good as it's a famous encyclopaedia and is updated regularly.

To help deeply understand Seacole's full journey, I used a website made specifically about her<sup>7</sup>. It talks about how inspirational she was to people during the mid-late 1800's, and how her legacy is being continued in modern day England. They discovered that she was in fact lost in history for around 100 years after her death. I believe that this source is reliable because the website is dedicated to Mary Seacole and it should be factually correct as she's the focus.

Another website<sup>8</sup> I used displayed a small amount of information, yet it was useful. One thing it stated was that Seacole was awarded the Order Of Merit **posthumously**, displaying that she was appreciated enough after her death to earn this. The source is dependable as it comes from a reputable, popular and knowledgeable website.

Again, a different website I used for information was the BBC News site<sup>9</sup>. It had a detailed description of the newly-unveiled statue of Seacole outside of St. Thomas' hospital. This source is very likely to be reliable as it is a majorly popular site, which also broadcasts on television; every article on the website would have to be thoroughly checked for definite factual information before being published. In addition, I also used this website for an image resource. It is a drawing and displays Mary Seacole in The British Hotel caring towards a soldier in a bed, whilst simultaneously holding up a 'Punch' magazine (where the source comes from). The magazine was published in 1857, which is one year after the Crimean War ended. This ignites the fact that Seacole was well-known even after the war ended, as

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resources

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credibility

<sup>5</sup> Ross, Stewart Florence Nightingale (2014)

<sup>6</sup>

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Mary-Seacole>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.maryseacoletrust.org.uk>

<sup>8</sup> <https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/mary-seacole>

<sup>9</sup> [Mary Seacole statue unveiled in London - BBC News](#)



appearing in a magazine is not common unless you are famous/ popular. The picture is shown below:



A primary resource I used was a letter<sup>10</sup> that was sent by one soldier to another regarding the disease/ injuries in the Crimean War. I retrieved the information from a website that holds many similar sources. The letter demonstrates that British soldiers were concerned about the amount of disease/loss and whether it would affect their chance of winning the war. This links into Mary Seacole as it describes the large amount of illness that would have been deeply affecting soldiers' lives, which would be easily fixed with the help of a nurse out on the battlefield. It's an extremely dependable source as it's written by somebody who experienced it.

*ABC  
page* I used one painting as research for my project. It displays the hardships that soldiers went through; It shows how much Seacole would've been required. Although it was painted after the war (secondary source), the painter specialises in the Crimean War, indicating that they are knowledgeable on the subject - showing that it's reliable. The painting is shown below:

<sup>10</sup> [Letter from the Crimean War - Debrett Ancestry Research](#)



'Crimean War Wounded, 1854' by Granger.



## Discussion:

### What Points Will be Covered?:

In this section, I will be conversing and deliberating the facts I have retrieved and gathered from my research, which have been previously explored in the 'Research Review' section of the essay. I will be going into detail about specific points, and linking them back to my question. In addition, I will be **appending** a counter argument as well as consistently referring back to my research.

A03 - presented  
in clear +  
logical order  
(2)

### Seacole's Medical Abilities:

From a young age, Seacole had learnt about/developed her skills in medicine as evidenced by her mother making herbal medicines in the hotel she ran, 'Blundell Hall', when Seacole was young<sup>11</sup>. As she was interested, her mother taught her the basics and she would practise on her dolls/toys.<sup>12</sup>

Years later, in 1850, Seacole assisted in nursing the victims of the Kingston cholera epidemic; She then decided to travel in 1851 to nurse people in Cruces, as they were suffering from a cholera outbreak too. Seven years prior to this, Seacole's husband passed away after being unwell for around eight years - she nursed him throughout this period.<sup>13</sup> This demonstrates her determination and commitment to the medical aspect of her life, and her courage for continuing after an enormous loss.

### Her Struggles:

Mary Seacole suffered immensely in different ways, and some of her struggles are what encouraged her to pursue her nursing career and inspire other people.

Firstly, a large aspect of her struggles include racism/racial prejudice. As a Jamaican woman in England during the 1800's, she was thought of as inferior solely due to her skin colour. This was first presented when she was 18, in 1823. Seacole and her friend - who was also believed to be Jamaican - had travelled overseas and were staying with Seacole's relatives (as they had done before at age 15). Seacole and her friend experienced large amounts of racial abuse by others whilst exploring the country, which would have been

<sup>11</sup> Howell, Izzi Mary Seacole (2016)

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.maryseacoletrust.org.uk>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.maryseacoletrust.org.uk>

A02  
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understanding

frightening considering that they were 18. Despite this, Seacole's friend was said to have become quite violent towards them as there were no police officers around.<sup>14</sup>

In addition, she also experienced racial prejudice before travelling over to Crimea to aid the soldiers. After recognising that, as publicly stated by the British Government in 1854, there was a lack of necessities and a breakdown of nursing, Seacole decided that she would volunteer to help. However, her request was denied purely due to the racial prejudice of England - 1800's. This was a large set-back for Seacole, but she was a very determined woman and so she travelled to Crimea in 1855 with a relative of her late husband; this displays how **resolute** she was.<sup>15</sup>

As previously mentioned in the prior section, Seacole was devastatingly struck with multiple losses of people she loved. Her mother, who's name is unknown, passed away when Seacole was aged 40-45 (unknown specifically when). This would have been extremely upsetting, as her mother taught her about medicine and essentially inspired her to pursue it. A short number of years later, Seacole's husband - Edwin Horatio Hamilton Seacole - also passed away. He had been ill for roughly 8 years prior to his death and Seacole had been nursing him to her best ability.

Although different from the death of loved ones, Seacole's home in Jamaica burnt down which would have impacted her emotions even further.<sup>16</sup>

The last major struggle in her life was financial loss. After the Crimean War ended in 1856, Seacole went back to Britain, despite having very little money and being declared bankrupt. As people admired, appreciated, and respected Seacole for her hard-work and kindness (including the soldiers that she aided), she was helped financially by many people - including soldiers, Generals, and members of the Royal Family. This clearly demonstrates how esteemed she was to Britain and how much she deserved this help; her dedication inspired and influenced many. The fact that the Royal Family contributed to helping Seacole when she was struggling suggests how much she truly impacted the way Britain felt about people of colour.<sup>17</sup>

Another way she was appreciated by the people of Britain was that, to help her raise money, they held a festival/concert in her honour on the bank of the River Thames that lasted 4 days.

## Pioneering In the War:

Mary Seacole became an influential **pioneer** whilst working in Crimea. After travelling from London to Crimea with a goal of helping soldiers (medically), she built her own hotel/hospital for them near the battlefield. This shows her immense dedication to helping others, as she was not given money for this hotel or any medical equipment. It was made from wood and metal sheets and was named 'The British Hotel'.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.maryseacoletrust.org.uk>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.maryseacoletrust.org.uk>

<sup>16</sup> Howell, Izzi Mary Seacole

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.maryseacoletrust.org.uk>

<sup>18</sup> Howell, Izzi Mary Seacole



The British Hotel supplied treatments and hot meals for injured soldiers and those in need. She did not refuse to treat anyone, regardless of their injuries or ethnicity etc. As time went on, Seacole became more 'famous' and was known as 'Mother Seacole'. She took pride in this name.

In the war, there were around 500,000 casualties (distributed evenly on both sides battling), and the main cause of death was disease. Paintings<sup>19</sup> display how bad the conditions were for the soldiers, and how desperately they needed medical assistance. This makes us realise how much Seacole would have been required during these times.

## Reputation in 1800's:

In the 1800's, Seacole, as mentioned previously, was praised greatly for her acts of service toward the soldiers battling in Crimea. This gratitude was expressed in a number of ways. Firstly, during the war (whilst she was pioneering and helping everyday) the British soldiers created and used a loving nickname for Seacole; this was 'mother'. This label has connotations of love, care, and compassion etc, implying that Seacole was a wonderful and delightful person. It also displays the positive impact that she had on everybody that she had **succoured**. In addition, Seacole referred to the soldiers as her figurative 'sons', demonstrating the close bond that developed between her and them over the duration of the Crimean War.<sup>20</sup> Even after the war, Seacole was mainly known by her nickname, Mother Seacole. This displays the importance of her, a good, caring and friendly person in the midst of a dark war.

Secondly, post-war, she was featured on a magazine cover (Punch Magazine) in 1857<sup>21</sup>, which clearly informs us of her popularity at the time (directly after coming back to Britain). The idea of Seacole being featured in a magazine shows the admiration she received from everyone around her, including the public entertainment industry; As well as already being 'famous' at the time, an appearance in a published article/ image would bring Seacole to many people's attention and would increase her 'fanbase', which would have already been made up of soldiers, friends and even royals.<sup>22</sup>

## Long Term Impact:

Posthumously, Mary Seacole had a large impact on relations between the races and celebrating people of colour for their determination. Various things related to Seacole have

<sup>19</sup> Crimean War Painting 'Crimean War Wounded, 1854' by Granger

<sup>20</sup> Fluhr, Nicole "THEIR CALLING ME 'MOTHER' WAS NOT, I THINK, ALTOGETHER UNMEANING": MARY SEACOLE'S MATERNAL PERSONAE

<sup>21</sup> [Mary Seacole statue unveiled in London - BBC News](#)

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.maryseacoletrust.org.uk>

A03  
referencing  
back to question  
Relevant information

occured in recent years. Firstly, on 30/6/2016, a statue of Seacole was unveiled at St. Thomas' hospital in London, specifically honouring her as a pioneer in her field.<sup>23</sup> This was unveiled after a 12-year campaign which raised £500,000 for the statue and to honour her. It is also said to be the first statue of a named black woman in the UK, which really displays her significance to the people of the UK.<sup>24</sup> Secondly, in 2004, she came in 1st place in the poll: 100 Great Black Britons UK.<sup>25</sup> This implies her uniqueness and importance. Lastly, Seacole was awarded the Order of Merit by the Government of Jamaica.<sup>26</sup>

AB  
evaluation

Although in recent years Seacole has been celebrated, she was unfortunately forgotten for around 100 years after her death in 1881, and there are many theories for this. The main explanation is that she was lost in history due to her race; someone that is mentioned largely in this point is Florence Nightingale. Nightingale has been known predominantly since she was a nurse in the mid 1800's, and has not once been forgotten. It's believed that this is because she was white, and Seacole was not.<sup>27</sup> A Professor of English, Sara Salih, edited a comment onto seacole's novel which stated that she was 'rapidly obscured from view by the metaphorical glare of Florence Nightingale's candle'.<sup>28</sup> This demonstrates that knowledgeable people who are high up in their professions also display a sense of sympathy towards Seacole, as she was evidently 'obscured' from the view of the public, causing her to be unremembered.

### Florence Nightingale:

On the other hand, it could be argued that Mary Seacole is no better than Nightingale and she was only forgotten because Florence was more known during the 1850's regardless. Nightingale helped in the Crimean War in the same ways that Seacole did (medically); she was evidently sent to Scutari Hospital, which she worked on to make it less unhygienic and dirty. In addition, dissimilar to Seacole, Nightingale opened up her own hospital after the war and kept working in the medical profession.<sup>29</sup>

evaluation  
A3 - Alternative  
supporting  
(2)

Furthermore, many nurses did the same job as Seacole (in the war) and they did not get nearly enough credit for their work.

<sup>23</sup> Harrison, Vashti Bold Women in Black History

<sup>24</sup> [Mary Seacole statue unveiled in London - BBC News](#)

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Mary-Seacole>

<sup>26</sup> <https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/mary-seacole>

<sup>27</sup> Howell, Izzi Mary Seacole

<sup>28</sup> Seacole, Mary Wonderful adventures of Mrs Seacole in Many Lands (1857): With an introduction written by Sara Salih.

<sup>29</sup> Ross, Stewart Florence Nightingale



# Conclusion and Evaluation:

## Conclusion:

In summary, Mary Seacole inspired and influenced an excessive amount of people during her lifetime, with just her kindness, determination, and courage. She was admired by many, and appreciated for her work as a pioneer and helper to the soldiers in the Crimean war. Furthermore, she is still praised today in various ways such as statues, websites, books and more. Seacole had her own battles, for example the racism she received, but she persevered through and became known as a strong, independent woman.

A04 -  
detailed  
conclusion  
based on  
evidence  
(2)

## Evaluation:

Throughout this project, I have learned much more concerning Black History and specifically, Mary Seacole. As well as academic knowledge, I have also obtained skills regarding research and time management. This means that, as written in my proposal form, I have achieved my objectives/ goals that I intended to achieve.

A04 - describe  
what learned.

At the beginning of the project, I was partly stressed as I did not know how to organise my research or when I would be writing certain things (eg. the proposal form or this essay), however with assistance and suggestions from my teacher, it was made clearer to me.

A04 - reacting  
to feedback

I regularly updated my activity log after every research session, visit, or important point that needed to be recorded.

One thing that relieved me of stress was the gantt chart; I am very glad that I was introduced to this, as it has helped me immensely throughout my research with organising my time. Despite having the gantt chart, I feel that I sometimes did not always follow it completely. Sometimes I would be too overwhelmed with homework for other subjects and would leave something for an extra few days instead of completing it straight away. If I were to do this project again, I would have followed it more closely.

A04 - SK. 66.

During my research, I felt that I couldn't find many primary sources that I would be able to effectively use, so if I were to do this again I would most likely visit an archive - as a group we visited the Bedford Archives so I have already had a small introduction. I also feel that I could have researched further to help me present my counter argument of the essay better/ help me add to it.

A04 limited  
ideas of  
what would do  
differently

Overall, I think that this project enhanced my knowledge, understanding and interest of black history.

## Glossary:

- Primary Research - A research method that relies on direct data collection.
- Secondary Research - The summary, collation and/or synthesis of existing research.
- Impecunious - Having little or no money.
- Versatile - Embracing a variety of skills, fields or subjects, as well as being able to turn with ease from one thing to another.
- Sutler - A civilian merchant who sells provisions to an army in the field.
- Posthumously - After the death of the originator.
- Appending - Add to the end of a written document.
- Resolute - Marked by firm determination.
- Pioneer - A person who is among the first to explore or settle a new country or area.
- Succoured - Give assistance or aid to.

## **Bibliography:**

Aoz - Range of resources.  
Bibliography in clear format.

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