

# INFLUENTIAL BLACK WOMEN & FEMALE ENTREPRENEURS

BY AKIRA HOLLAND

We've all heard countless stories about successful men in every part of history, the average history book is dominated with tales of Kings, male soldiers a myriad of other men who have seemingly shaped the world into what it is today. Now this isn't to say that women haven't been featured at all, but with almost [76% of popular history being written by men](#), it's no surprise that women only occupy around [0.5% of recorded history...](#) and even less for Black women.

We've been missing out on extraordinary stories of strength, power, intelligence and grace. The exciting collection of characters below allow us to explore a little-known world of remarkable events.



## BLACK FEMALES WERE INSPIRATIONAL BEFORE SLAVERY



A powerful force from the very beginning, Black women have had significant impacts on the world, but their stories seldom told. An abundance of strong and honourable Black women have lead in wars, built cities and used political tact to negotiate peace with their rivals, the list below highlights merely a few.

## THE FEMALE WARRIORS OF DAHOMEY

Some of the most feared women in history, selected to defend the Dahomey Kingdom and proven to be superior to the male peers. This untouchable army of females left colonisers shaking in their boots, they remain one of the only documented front-line female troops in modern warfare history. [Read more about the conquests here.](#)

## WARRIOR QUEEN ANIMATU OF ZAZZUA

One of the most famous hausa leaders, commanding an army of 20,000 men and expanding the borders of Zazzua. Amina's tactics helped to make Hausaland the centre of trade in the Saharan and West African region. [Read more about her story here.](#)

## YAA ASANTWAA, ASHANTI WARRIOR QUEEN

Queen mother Yaa Asantewaa, an image of strength and resistance, rallied her people into resistance against a British governor who demanded the Tribes most prized possession (The Golden Stool), in what came to be known as the War of the Golden Stool. [Read more about how she challenged traditional gender roles here.](#)

## QUEEN NZINGHA, AMAZON QUEEN OF MATAMBA

Ranked among the greatest rulers in Africa, best known for negotiating peace with the slave-hunting Portuguese (doing so with astonishing skill and political tact), and setting her people free from slavery. [Read more on her triumphs here.](#)

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# BLACK FEMALES ARE INFLUENTIAL

There's no doubting that Black women are creative, inventive and worthy of praise. Continually triumphant, no matter how high the hurdle, Black women are constantly pushing boundaries. Now recognised as the most [educated group in America](#), Black women have been, and are still paving the way for many.



### AVA DUVERNAY (1972 - PRESENT)

The legend that is Ava DuVernay, has put representation at the forefront of her critically-acclaimed works such as [13th](#), [Selma](#) and [When They See Us](#). She's the first woman of colour to direct an Oscar-nominated best picture film; the first Black woman to win the best feature directing award at Sundance in 2012 and it doesn't stop there, [find out about more of Ava's firsts here.](#)

### PHILLIS WHEATLEY (1773 - 1784)

The first ever African woman to be published in Britain and America in 1773. Born in West Africa and sold to an American family as a child. Phillis learned to read and write, displaying undeniable literary talent in her first verse at just 14 years old; the poet later moved to England at the age of 20. Her work was used as evidence that enslaved people were more than capable of intellectual originality and [had a monumental influence on the anti-slavery movement.](#)





### **SURYA BONALY (1973 - PRESENT)**

A world champion famous for being the only female figure skater in history to do a backflip. In a world that did not want to accept her, often marked down for her 'lack of grace', Surya resisted the rules and pushed boundaries, in an undying effort to prove her talent. "Even if it was just some push ups, if someone asked me to do 20, I would do 30 and I think that has helped me through life by always giving more," says Bonaly. [Read more on her incredible story of resistance here](#) or [watch more on Netflix](#).

### **CLAUDIA JONES (1915 - 1964)**

A Trinidadian woman raised in New York, and spending her later life in London, Claudia launched the West Indian Gazette – an anti-racist newspaper fighting for social equality. She is also the pioneer behind the famous Notting Hill Carnival, a celebration of Caribbean heritage, arts and culture. [Read more about Claudia's story here](#).



### **WANGARI MAATHAI (1940 - 2011)**

Her environmental work in Kenya made her the first Black woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize, in 2004. In addition to that, Wangari was also the first woman in East & Central Africa to earn a doctorate degree. While sitting as Chairman of the National Council of Women in Kenya, [Maathai introduced an initiative responsible for planting over 51 million trees in Kenya since 1977](#).

### **MARY SEACOLE (1805 - 1881)**

Most people remember the story Florence Nightingale, but unlikely that you have heard much about Mary Seacole. Born and raised in Jamaica, Mary arrived in England in 1854, with a passion for helping the injured. Rejected by the War Office during the Crimean War (1853-1856), Mary raised the money herself, in order to travel to Ukraine and help injured British soldiers on the other side. [Learn more about Seacole's ventures here](#).

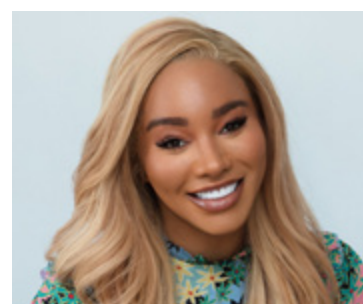


### **DR SHIRLEY THOMPSON OBE (1958 - PRESENT)**

In 2004, Thompson became the first woman in Europe to conduct and compose a symphony within the last 40 years. New Nation Rising was a 21st century symphony, celebrating London's history and marking the Queen's Golden Jubilee. [Learn more about her other pieces here](#).

### **MUNROE BERGDORF (1987 - PRESENT)**

Rising to fame as she was dropped from a L'Oreal campaign for speaking out about racism. A model and activist who uses her platform to campaign about race, diversity, gender and LGBTQ+ rights. Turning a negative into a positive, [Bergdorf recently accepted the invitation to join L'Oreal's UK Diversity and Inclusion Advisory Board](#).



# BLACK FEMALE ENTREPRENEURS

Although greatly underfunded, [Black Women are one of the fastest \(if not the fastest\) growing group of entrepreneurs](#). In spite of great contributions to the creative market, businesses run by Black females tend to face great difficulty. In the US Black businesses are [twice as likely](#) to be rejected for business loans and in the [UK 61% did not consider all female teams for funding](#).

In spite of all this, businesses in the UK run by Black and brown entrepreneurs contribute between [£25-£32 billion](#) annually. Black female entrepreneurs have been contributing and continue to contribute to various markets - “Black female entrepreneurs don’t make excuses, we find solutions. We’re leaders, resourceful, ambitious, hard-working, and creative. We’re powerful, unstoppable, confident, smart, and fearless. We’re Exquisite Black Queens that represent Black Excellence... We are success! There’s no denying it... Black female entrepreneurs are resilient, and we rock!”, Stephanie Lahart, Author. significant roles in British history.



## MADAME CJ WALKER (1867 - 1919)

The [first female self-made millionaire](#) in America. This legendary entrepreneur, philanthropist, and political activist, built an empire and used her fortune to fund scholarships, donate large parts of her wealth to the NAACP, the black YMCA and other charities.

## LAVINYA STENNETT (1997 - PRESENT)

Founder of [The Black Curriculum UK](#), with the vision to create a more robust and accurate depiction of Black people and Black history in schools across Britain. [Learn more about her story here.](#)



## LADY PHYLL (1974 - PRESENT)

[Phyllis Akua Opoku-Gyimah](#) (A.K.A Lady Phyll), is a force to be reckoned with. Not only is she a co-founder of Black Pride UK, her incredible activist work has increased visibility and advocacy for Queer, Trans and Intersex People of Colour (QTIPOC) in the UK and across the world.

## JUNE ANGELIDES (1984 - PRESENT)

Named one of the [most influential Tech Leaders](#) in 2018 by the Financial Times; an early stage investor at Samos Investments; and founder of Mums in Technology, the first child-friendly coding school in the UK.



# MORE THAN A STEREOTYPE

As much as most people choose not to believe it, the ‘angry black woman’ cliché is still attempting to hinder the work of Black women across the UK, and the rest of the world. A world that has benefited from the essential workings of Black artists, writer, scientists, philanthropists, activists, inventors, athletes and so much more. Black female figures have, and will continue to thrive in challenging conditions, always doing so with everlasting grace, and it is been an honour to give them a little piece of the spotlight.