



Pauline Jackson, Honor Administrator, United States of America, 1966



Pauline Jackson, Contributor – Administrator, was one of the first Black swimmers to compete in elite marathons at a time when many competitions barred participation by Blacks. As a New Yorker she must have seen and been inspired by the coverage of IMSHOF Honoree Ida Elionsky's 1916 around Manhattan swim and IMSHOF Honoree Gertrude Ederle's 1926 successful English Channel swim. In 1926, at age 35, Pauline entered and won her first open water swim. She set her sights on the English Channel and the Black press supported her intent, hopeful that a successful swim would promote racial equality.

She was accepted in 1927 into the first Wrigley Ocean Marathon across the Catalina Channel. This was major news in New York and Los Angeles at the time. Pauline was unable to raise the funds to travel across the country, pay for extended lodging in California, and secure a trainer/tracking boat for the event. Additionally, she faced substantial color barriers: travel at the time could be highly difficult and dangerous for Blacks - especially women. In many US states, segregation and Jim Crow laws made it impossible to find a hotel, restaurant, or even rest room that accommodated Blacks. While Black sportswriters expressed disappointment that Pauline failed to show up for the Catalina swim, they continued to praise her as the "champion Black woman swimmer" and supported her aspirations.

She competed in the 1927, 1928 and 1931 Wrigley Marathon Swims at Canadian National Exhibition. She was the first and only Black (male or female) to participate in the marathons of 1927 and 1928, and the only Black woman to compete in the 1931 swim. In the combined male/female 33.8 km/21-mile event in 1927 there were 173 starters. Only 3 finished in 9C waters and Pauline lasted 6 hours/17.7 km. She out-performing almost all other starters including the favorite IMSHOF Honoree George Young – which was again major news. In 1928 she completed 12.1 km of the 16.1 km/10-mile race and in 1931 she completed 14.5 km of the 16.1 km/10-mile race before being pulled with cramps.

In 1928 Pauline was accepted as the only Black member of the International Professional Swimmers Association. She was never able to raise the funds for her English Channel dream.

Simply put, Pauline Jackson broke barriers in the sport and paved the way for future Black marathon swimmers.

[Expanded Biography \(Openwaterpedia\)](#)