

Black History Month

More Than Enough

Written by Joanna Brooks

I don't remember at which point I realized what I'm about to write next. I just know that it came to me, clearly, and as a form of relief.

There is a place for me in Pilates.

I am a Black woman. I have been teaching yoga for 10 years and Pilates for the last two. I am the owner of Embody Yoga-a yoga, and now a Pilates studio, with a mission to share both practices with people of color in a way that is accessible, affordable and culturally relevant.

I completed my Pilates training through Peak Pilates® at Kinetic MKE in 2023 and my movement background/training began with yoga in 2014. Back then, it was not unusual to be the only person of color in a studio. And it was rare to be led in practice by anyone other than a white woman.

So when I came to Pilates in 2022, I was both shocked and relieved to find that I was not the only one. Well-that's not quite right. I was the only woman of color in my Level 1 training, but as we moved through training and began practice teaching on bodies, I realized I was not alone.

A few of the bodies that walked in that day (and subsequent practice teaching days) were Black and they belonged to Pilates teachers!

Diversity matters. Representation matters. And in this practice, I didn't have to work to create the diversity that I wanted to see (as I have sought to do with yoga in my community). It already existed. I was able to see myself reflected in this practice. It felt good to know that I was

simply one of many, not the only one.

And this was enough for me.

But it wasn't enough for my Master Instructor, teacher, mentor and friend Trey Frey, owner of Kinetic MKE. Despite the diversity that I saw in this practice – he said it wasn't enough. In my very first day of training he spoke of the current state (and cost) of Pilates and the importance of making the practice accessible to all.

He educated me and the other students about the legacy of Kathy Stanford Grant. Then he sat with me and watched videos of this master teacher doing what she did best. He affirmed me and my place in the Pilates world. And then he connected me with Blossom Leilani Crawford & Kim Haroche (two of Kathy's long-time assistants) who shared with me how happy Kathy would be to know that there are more Black people, like me, doing and teaching Pilates.

And this was more than enough for me.

Shortly after I completed my Level II training, Trey informed me that Peak was offering teacher training scholarships for aspiring teachers from underrepresented communities. As the owner of a Black owned and operated Yoga and Pilates studio, I was more than happy to share this information with many of my students who, like me, had fallen in love with this practice.

Several of our students applied and received scholarships, removing the barrier of entry to the field and making it possible for them to become teachers as well. Many of those teachers are now teaching Pilates at Embody Yoga.

And here is the impact-for many of our Pilates students, their first experience with Pilates has been under the guidance of a Black woman. For some, that will be their only experience.

They will never have to be the only. They will know,

automatically, that Pilates belongs to them too.

From a business perspective, with more Pilates teachers on staff, we are able to offer more Pilates classes, thereby introducing more people of color to this practice. And this has positioned our studio and business to grow. In April we will be expanding our studio to offer larger group Reformer and Mat classes to meet our current demand.

And all of this is more than I ever could have imagined or hoped for.

Diversity matters.

I'd like to think that Kathy Stanford Grant is somewhere smiling really big right now.

Thank you Peak Pilates®.

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