The Life and Times of Madam C.J. Walker

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Originally, when we heard that the theme for this year’s National History Project was communication, we thought of marketing. We weren’t thinking very deeply about it, but we knew that we wanted to explore the ways in which sellers market their products to the general public. However, this idea ended up being too broad to create a whole project around. That’s when our teacher stepped in and told us about Madam C.J. Walker. None of us had ever heard of her before; however, the more we learned about her life, the more interested we became in her story.

After a quick Google search, we discovered that Madam C.J. Walker’s great-great-granddaughter, A’Lelia Bundles, was still alive. Not only was a direct descendant of Madam Walker still alive, but she had dedicated her entire life to researching and teaching others about Madam Walker’s story and legacy today. We soon found out that A’Lelia Bundles had written a book about Madam Walker, which, along with informative websites, newspaper articles, and advertisements, proved extremely helpful during the research process. After completing our initial research, we decided to reach out to A’Lelia Bundles, as well as a few other experts like Dr. Tyrone Freeman and Dr. Paul Mullins, to conduct interviews, which let us learn about Madam Walker on a much more personal level.

We had always planned to present our project as an exhibit. We knew that we wanted to create something beauty-related as that was Madam Walker’s occupation and speciality, and therefore, a magazine was the perfect blend of vintage beauty and descriptive information. With different pages representing different parts/aspects of Madam Walker’s life, we were able to
organize all of our research, including images, into a physical and accessible poster board magazine.

Madam C.J. Walker is significant to history as she, against all odds, rose from a state of poverty to become the first female self-made millionaire, changing the game for both women and Black people. Not only that, she played a huge role in the fight for racial and gender equality, using her wealth, success, and platform to speak out about significant political and social issues of her time. Through both her business and philanthropic work, Madam Walker was able to give a real voice to people who typically did not have one.

Our project encapsulates both aspects of this year's theme: communication and understanding. Madam Walker’s brilliant marketing and communications strategies not only allowed her to build a strong, recognizable brand, but to fill a void in the cosmetic industry that had been empty for decades. She communicated the idea that women, specifically Black women, could be economically independent, giving them an opportunity to start and grow their own businesses. As a result, people began to understand that women did deserve a place in both the beauty and business communities, paving the way for many of the successful entrepreneurs we know and look up to today.
Works Cited

Primary:

*Amazing Progress of Colored Race*. National Museum of African American History and Culture, nmaahc.si.edu/object/nmaahc_2013.153.11.1?destination=edan-search/collection_search%3Fedan_q%3D%252A%25253A%25252A%2526edan_fq%255B0%255D%3Dp.edanmdm.indexedstructured.name%25253A%2522Walker%2522C%2520Madam%2520C.J.%26edan_local%3D1%26op%3DSearch. Accessed 30 Nov. 2020. Taken from the National Museum of African American History and Culture, this primary source is a newspaper advertisement for Madam C.J. Walker products from the early 20th century. The intended audience of this source was African American women, who were the ones who bought her cosmetics. During the research process, this advertisement served as both a visual and a source of primary quotes.

"Madam CJ Walker, Guest of Greater Kansas City, Steps from Washtub to Millionaire in Fourteen Years. Give Two Lectures While Here." *Kansas City Advocate* [Kansas City, Kansas], 1 Mar. 1918. *Newspapers.com*, www.newspapers.com/clip/46475356/1918-interview-with-madam-cj-walker/. Accessed 2 Jan. 2021. Written by Thomas Kennedy and found on the container website Newspapers.com, this primary source is a 1918 newspaper article and interview with Madam C.J. Walker from the Kansas City Advocate newspaper, an African American and republican newspaper centered around issues involving "race progress and human uplift." The intended audience of this source was liberal-leaning African American citizens interested in matters regarding racial equality. This article details the significance of Madam C.J. Walker's life, including her rise to success, marketing strategies, and philanthropic work. It incorporates many different perspective quotes from other newspapers like the Des Moines Leader and from Madam C.J. Walker herself as well.
of the U.S. House of Representatives, Record Group 233; National Archives Building, Washington, DC. [Online Version, https://www.docsteach.org/documents/document/awsa-memorial, January 2, 2021] This primary source is a memorial to the United States House of Representatives from the American Women Suffrage Association from February 2, 1872, found on the National Archives Foundation website. Led by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, the National Women Suffrage Association opposed the exclusion of women in the 15th amendment, and wrote this document to ask that women be allowed to vote and hold office. This source provided significant contextual information on the time period, specifically, the views on and changing status of women in American society.


Washington, Booker T. "Booker T. Washington's Atlanta Exposition Speech." 18 Sept. 1895. State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs,
iowaculture.gov/sites/default/files/history-education-pss-areconstruction-atlanta-transcription.pdf. Accessed 29 Dec. 2020. Speech. This primary source speech titled the “Atlanta Compromise” was delivered in 1895 by black educator and orator Booker T. Washington. This address was given to the president and board of directors at a showcase about the economic progress of the South after the Civil War. In his speech, Washington talks a lot about his strategy for combating racial inequity, which proved extremely helpful for contextual primary sources.

"The Women's Rights Movement, 1848–1917." History, Art, and Archives, United States House of Representatives, 2007,

history.house.gov/Exhibitions-and-Publications/WIC/Historical-Essays/No-Lady/Womens-Rights/. Accessed 4 Jan. 2021. Found in the History, Art, and Archives collection of the United States House of Representatives website, this secondary source from 2007 is an article on the Women's Rights Movement from 1848-1917. This source touches on important women's suffrage leaders, significant historical events, like the ratification of the 15th amendment in 1870, and the divisions that emerged between leaders over the years. The intended audience is aimed at anyone interested in the history of the Women's Rights Movement in the U.S. This source provided essential information when researching the context of post-Civil War America, specifically, the status of women during the time period.

Secondary:

It explains many different aspects of Madam Walker's life, including her early years, the growth of her cosmetics business, and her legacy. It did an especially great job illuminating how Madam Walker started her hair care company, providing beneficial information on the business and marketing section of the research process.


Bundles, A'Lelia. "The Facts about Madam C. J. Walker and Annie Malone." *A'Lelia Bundles*, aleliabundles.com/the-facts-about-madam-c-j-walker-and-annie-malone/. Accessed 23 Nov. 2020. This secondary source is an article written by A'Lelia Bundles that was published on her website, including several primary source photographs. This article was written for anyone with an interest in Madam Walker's life, especially her relationship with beauty pioneer Annie Malone, and was written to dispute the myths about Walker and Malone's relationship. This source proved beneficial when doing contextual research, in that it provided a great deal of descriptive information on Madam Walker's early life, her job as a saleswomen for Annie Malone, and her own business.
---. *On Her Own Ground: The Life and Times of Madam C. J. Walker*. This book is a secondary source written by A'Lelia Bundles, the great-great-granddaughter of Madam C.J. Walker and an expert on her life. *On Her Own Ground* perfectly encapsulates the triumph of Madam C.J. Walker in her fight against racism and sexism in society, educating readers about Walker's ability to effectively communicate with her black consumers in the cosmetics market by making products specifically for them.

Bundles, A'Lelia, and Paul Mullins, Dr. Videoconference interview. 25 Jan. 2021. This secondary source is an interview with A'Lelia Bundles and Dr. Paul Mullins. A'Lelia Bundles is the great-great-granddaughter of Madam C.J. Walker, and has spent her life researching and educating others on the life and work of Madam Walker; Dr. Paul Mullins is a professor of anthology at the University of Indiana and an expert on Madam C.J. Walker's business. This interview was conducted in order to fully understand the life and work of Madam Walker with the help of professionals, and was done with a focus on Madam Walker's marketing strategies.

Freeman, Tyrone McKinley, Dr. Videoconference interview. 14 Jan. 2021. This secondary source is a first-hand interview conducted by Kara Cooper, Juliana Swartz, and Patricia Soldato, going into detail about the philanthropy and legacy of Madam C.J. Walker. Dr. Tyrone Freeman is an award-winning scholar and professor of philanthropic studies at Indiana University. The interview lasted approximately an hour and went over many different topics, such as how Madam Walker closed the gap in the beauty community and how she communicated with her consumers and employees to establish her brand.

www.pbs.org/wnet/african-americans-many-rivers-to-cross/history/100-amazing-facts/madam-walker-the-first-black-american-woman-to-be-a-self-made-millionaire/. Accessed 30 Dec. 2020. This secondary source article by Henry Louis Gates Jr., the Director of the Hutchins Center for African and African American Research at Harvard University, was published by PBS as part of Gates' "African Americans; Many Rivers to Cross" television miniseries. This intended audience of this article was anyone interested in African American history. The source included detailed analysis on Madam Walker's life and business strategies, significantly aiding the context, marketing, and philanthropy sections of the project.

George, Alice. "How Business Executive Madam C.J. Walker Became a Powerful Influencer of the Early 20th Century." *Smithsonian Magazine*, Smithsonian Institution, 21 Mar. 2019, www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/how-business-executive-madam-c-j-walker-became-powerful-influencer-early-20th-century-180971628/. Accessed 16 Nov. 2020. This secondary source is an article published by the Smithsonian Magazine and written by Alice George, Ph.D, an independent historian who focuses on America in the 1960's. It was written for the general public, especially those interested in African-American entrepreneurship, providing an overview of Madam C.J. Walker's life, context on her business, and her marketing strategies. This article provided key insight through secondary source quotes from historians, primary source images, as well as many additional links to other helpful sites embedded within the article.

Accessed 24 Jan. 2021. This secondary source article was written by Tiffany M. Gill and was published on the Black Perspectives website as part of a week-long online forum in 2019 during the week of the 100th anniversary of Madam C.J. Walker's death in 1919. This source provided insightful secondary quotes and analysis, comparing and contrasting Madam C.J. Walker's Business and Rihanna's Fenty Beauty, as well as representing the modern-day impact of Madam Walker’s success. It included beneficial information on both marketing strategies and the business impact of consumers and employees, and proved beneficial for the marketing and philanthropy sections of the project.

"How Madam C.J. Walker Used Beauty Products to Create Opportunities for African American Women." *Smithsonian American Women's History Initiative*, Smithsonian, 23 Mar. 2020, womenshistory.si.edu/news/2020/03/how-madam-cj-walker-used-beauty-products-create-opportunities-african-american-women. Accessed 16 Nov. 2020. This secondary source article was written and published by the collection "Because of HER Story; Smithsonian." It provided general foundational information on Madam C.J. Walker's life and business, facts that were very helpful when creating the initial project outline. The intended audience of this source was anyone interested in the basic historical facts of Madam Walker's life.

"How the Story of Madam C.J. Walker Impacted the History of American Entrepreneurs."

www.businesswomen.org/2019/02/madam-cj-walker-history-american-entrepreneurs.htm
1. Accessed 24 Nov. 2020. This secondary source is an article published in 2019 on the website Business Women, a site dedicated to praising women in business and their
accomplishments. The article was written for younger readers, and gives a brief, but informative rundown of Madam Walker's life. This source had many concise secondary quotes that pertained to Madam Walker’s legacy and philanthropy.


Kettler, Sara. "How Madam C.J. Walker Invented Her Hair Care Products." *Biography*, A&E Television Networks, 10 Feb. 2020, www.biography.com/news/madam-cj-walker-invent-hair-care-products. Accessed 17 Nov. 2020. Written in early 2020, this article is a secondary source that contains some primary source photographs as well. It was published on the website Biography and was written to educate a general population on the lack of black hair products in the beauty industry during Madam Walker's life. This article proved significantly helpful as it connects the context of the beauty industry at the time with Madam C.J. Walker's story very well.
Lagace, Martha. "HBS Cases: Beauty Entrepreneur Madam Walker." *Harvard Business School*, Harvard College, 25 June 2007, hbswk.hbs.edu/item/hbs-cases-beauty-entrepreneur-madam-walker. Accessed 29 Dec. 2020. This is a secondary source article written and organized by Martha Lagace, a senior editor for Harvard Business School with a PhD in Social Anthropology, with quotes and interviews from Katherine Miller and Nancy F. Koehn from Harvard Business School Cases. This source was written with the intended audience being those interested in African American history in business. The article was beneficial in providing many secondary source quotes from Koehn and Miller, providing descriptive information on important historical events, as well as adding expert analysis.

Lange, Allison. "National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage." *National Women's History Museum*, www.crusadeforthevote.org/naows-opposition. Accessed 5 Jan. 2021. Published by the National Women's History Museum in 2015, this secondary source is an article on the National Association Opposed to Women's Suffrage, including a primary perspective quote from Jane Addams and a primary image of the NAOWS headquarters. This source was targeted at anyone interested in the women's suffrage movement. This article provided context of the time period that was essential to the research process.

"Madam C.J. Walker." *Madam C.J. Walker*, A'Lelia Bundles, 2020, madamecjwalker.com/. Accessed 16 Nov. 2020. This secondary source is a website created by A'Lelia Bundles, the great-great-granddaughter of Madam C.J. Walker, containing descriptive and reliable information on all aspects of Madam Walker's life, including her early years, the growth of her business, and her philanthropic work. The intended audience of this source is general, written to educate anyone interested in the life and legacy of Madam Walker.
"Madam C.J. Walker's 'Wonderful Hair Grower.'" National Museum of African American History and Culture, nmaahc.si.edu/blog-post/madam-cj-walker%E2%80%99s-%E2%80%9Cwonderful-hair-grower. Accessed 16 Nov. 2020. This secondary source is an article from the National Museum of African American History and Culture website, written for a general audience. It includes beneficial background information on the beginning of the Madam C.J. Walker Manufacturing Company as well as a picture of her most popular product, "Madam C.J. Walker's Wonderful Hair Grower." This source was extremely useful for constructing the project outline and the context section of the project.

Michals, Debra. "Madam C.J. Walker." National Women's History Museum, 2015, www.womenshistory.org/education-resources/biographies/madam-cj-walker. Accessed 16 Nov. 2020. This secondary source from the National Women's History Museum is an article and biography of Madam C.J. Walker from 2015. It was written by Debra Michals, Ph.D., a historian and professor of Women's and Gender Studies at Merrimack College, and was generally targeted at anyone interested in the life of Madam C.J. Walker. Although brief, this source provided a primary source image of Madam Walker, and established a solid foundational understanding of Madam C.J. Walker's life and present-day impact, setting the scene for further, more specific research.

Oatman-Stanford, Hunter. "The Sharecropper's Daughter Who Made Black Women Proud of Their Hair." Collectors Weekly, Auctions Online, 31 Aug. 2015, www.collectorsweekly.com/articles/madam-walker/. Accessed 29 Dec. 2020. This secondary source article was written by Hunter-Oatman Stanford and was published by Collectors Weekly. This article was mainly written for people who are interested in
African American history, especially in the business world. This was a great article to read for primary source photos, as well as secondary source quotes about Madam Walker’s philanthropy in the business world.

Rolland, Abby. "'Gospel of Giving': Madam C.J. Walker and her philanthropy." Lilly Family School of Philanthropy, Public University in Indianapolis, Indiana, 20 Mar. 2020, blog.philanthropy.iupui.edu/2020/03/20/gospel-of-giving-madam-c-j-walker-and-her-philanthropy/comment-page-1/. Accessed 21 Jan. 2021. This secondary source is an article and interview with Dr. Tyrone Freeman, a professor and expert on Madam C.J. Walker's philanthropy, from the Indiana University Website. The intended audience of this source was anyone, especially Indiana University students, interested in researching Madam C.J. Walker's life and legacy. This source provided a photograph of Madam Walker at the dedication of the Senate Ave. YMCA in Indianapolis as well as quotes from Dr. Freeman on Madam Walker's philanthropic work.


Images:
Badge from the National Convention of Madam C. J. Walker's Agents. 1917. National Museum of African American History and Culture, Smithsonian, nmaahc.si.edu/object/nmaahc_2013.153.2.1?destination=edan-search/collection_search%3Fedan_q%3D%252A%253A%252A%26edan_fq%255B0%255D%3Dp.edanmdm.in dexstructured.name%253A%2522Walker%252C%2520Madam%2522%26edan_local%3D1%26op%3DSearch. Accessed 30 Nov. 2020. This photograph from the National Museum of African American History and Culture displays a badge from the national convention of Madam C.J. Walker's agents in 1917.

Flanner House Homes. 1960. Archaeology and Material Culture, paulmullins.wordpress.com/2015/07/19/gardens-in-the-black-city-landscaping-20th-century-african-america/. Accessed 24 Jan. 2021. This 1960 photograph from the Archaeology and Material Culture website shows two Flanner House homes, part of a community development program titled "Less than a fair start." Madam C.J. Walker was a very vocal supporter of Flanner House and donated a significant amount of money to the agency.


The Georgia Negro City and rural population 1890. 1890. Library of Congress, www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/ppmsca.33873/. Accessed 2 Jan. 2021. This infographic from Library of Congress shows the city and rural populations of African Americans in Georgia in 1890 and was used to show the migration from rural areas to industrial cities during the Turn of the Century.
Governor P.B.S. Pinchback. PBS,
www.pbs.org/wnet/african-americans-many-rivers-to-cross/history/the-black-governor-who-was-almost-a-senator/. Accessed 7 Jan. 2021. This photo from the website PBS displays a portrait of P.B.S. Pinchback, the 24th Governor of Louisiana from December 9, 1872, to January 13, 1873.

Howard University historical views 1900. Howard University,

Madam C.J. Walker Beauty Culture. Madam C.J. Walker Beauty Culture,

Newspaper ad for Madam C.J. Walker Preparations. Biography,

1920s stereopticon advertisement. University of Michigan,
exhibitions.kelsey.lsa.umich.edu/fwk/stereo.html. Accessed 30 Jan. 2021. This image from the University of Michigan is an advertisement for a stereopticon from the 1920s.

Photograph of Annie Malone from a souvenir booklet about Poro College Company, 1920-27. National Museum of African American History and Culture,
American History and Culture website, this is an image of beautician Annie Malone from the front cover of Poro College Company Booklet from 1920-1927.

*Return of the 'wickedest city': a street in rebuilt Port Royal, circa 1895. The Guardian,*


Rollins, Suzanne. *Bethel AME Church. National Park Service,* U.S. Department of the Interior,


*Susan B. Anthony Lecture Ticket, 1882. National Women's History Museum,*

www.crusadeforthevote.org/primary-documents-1. Accessed 2 Jan. 2021. This is an image of a ticket to one of Susan B. Anthony's lectures in 1882 from the National Women's History Museum website.

*Tin for Madame C.J. Walker's Wonderful Hair Grower. National Museum of African American History and Culture,* Smithsonian,

nmaahc.si.edu/object/nmaahc_2011.159.6?destination=edan-search/collection_search%3Fedan_q%3D%252A%252A%252A%252A%26edan_fq%255B0%255D%3Dp.edanmdm.indext estructured.name%253A%2522Walker%252C%2520Madam%2522%26edan_local%3D1%26op%3DSearch. Accessed 30 Nov. 2020. This is a photograph and 3D model of a tin of Madam's C.J. Walker's most popular product, "Madam CJ Walker's Wonderful Hair Grower."
Source Credit Text:
Portrait of Madam CJ Walker, On Her Own Ground
Title:
The Times and Life of Madam C.J. Walker

Thesis:
In the late 19th century, African-American beautician and entrepreneur Madam C.J. Walker communicated to her consumers by marketing her hair-care products specifically to the Black community, which allowed her to fill the gap in the beauty market for African American women in a world of systemic racism and sexism.
Source Credit Text:
“The Sharecropper’s Daughter Who Made Black Women Proud of Their Hair,” Hunter Oatman-Stanford, Collectors Weekly
On Her Own Ground, A’Leila Bundles
“Madam C.J. Walker: A Brief Biological Essay,” A’Leila Bundles
Confidential Poro Price List pamphlet for Poro dealers, 1950, National Museum of African American History and Culture
“The Facts About Madam C.J. Walker and Annie Malone,” A’Leila Bundles
Annie Malone, Poro College Company Booklet, 1920-27
Booker T. Washington, “The Atlanta Compromise,” September 18, 1895
Susan B. Anthony, Memorial to Congress, 1872
Jane Addams, National Women’s History Museum
Susan B. Anthony lecture ticket, 1882, National Women’s History Museum
Men looking at advertisements presented by the NAOWS, National Women’s History Museum
Against the Odds

During the Turn of the Century, in a time of racism and sexism, it was extremely difficult for women, especially Black women, like Sarah Breedlove, to have a platform and use their voice.

Early Life

Madam C.J. Walker “was born Sarah Breedlove in Delta, Louisiana, in 1867 to sharecropper parents who worked on a cotton plantation where they were previously enslaved” (“The Sharecropper’s Daughter Who Made Black Women Proud of Their Hair”).

“I had little or no opportunity when I started out in life, having been left an orphan and being without mother or father since I was seven years of age...” (Madam C.J. Walker, On Her Own Ground).

“As a child she craved for the beautiful. She had an inordinate desire to move among the things of culture and refinement” (Walker’s childhood friend, “The Life Work of Mme. C. J. Walker”).

“Without an education, Walker was left to help her family pick cotton, and perform other chores. Her reputation for her ambition and hard work would shape the woman she would become two decades later” (“The Life Work of Mme. C. J. Walker”).
“She moved to St. Louis to join her four brothers who had established themselves as barbers. Working for as little as $1.50 a day, she managed to save enough money to educate her daughter in the city’s public schools” (A’Lelia Bundles, “Madam C.J. Walker: A Brief Biological Essay”).

Before Madam Walker, Annie Malone was a pioneer in the beauty industry.

“Walker enrolled at Malone’s Poro College and later became a Poro agent” (“Annie Malone and Madam C.J. Walker: Pioneers of the African American Beauty Industry”).

"To Madam Walker's annoyance, the new Mrs. Malone was featured on the front page of the Recorder in her seven-passenger Packard in a photograph very similar to Madam Walker's frequently used publicity shot” (On Her Own Ground).


Supporters and Opponents of Racial Equality

“The Negroes in the country [are] wholly devoid of morality. The women [are] prostitutes and all [are] natural thieves and liars” (James W. Jacks, president of the Missouri Press Association, On Her Own Ground).
“[I] believed that through hard work and hard-earned respect, African Americans would gain the esteem of white society and eventually full citizenship” (Booker T. Washington, “Booker T. Washington and the Atlanta Compromise”).

“If need be, in defense of yours, interlacing our industrial, commercial, civil, and religious life with yours in a way that shall make the interests of both races one. In all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress” (Booker T. Washington's “Atlanta Compromise” Speech, 1895).

Supporters and Opponents of Gender Equality

“The American Woman Suffrage Association respectfully prays your honorable bodies to enact a law authorizing women, who are citizens of the United States...to vote and hold office” (Susan B. Anthony, Memorial to Congress from the American Woman Suffrage Association, 1872).

“I do not believe that women are better than men. We have not wrecked railroads, nor corrupted legislature, nor done many unholy things that men have done; but then we must remember that we have not had the chance” (Jane Addams, National Women’s History Museum).

Elizabeth Cady Stanton “denounced the extension of voting rights to African-American men while restrictions on women remained” and ‘praised the virtues of “educated white women’” (“The Women’s Rights Movement, 1848–1917”).
Source Credit Text:
*On Her Own Ground*, A’Lelia Bundles
Map of states affected by Reconstruction Act, 1867, Boston Public Library
Booker T. Washington, “The Atlanta Compromise,” September 18, 1895
Howard University class of 1900, Howard University, 1900
Map of population of African-Americans, 1890, Library of Congress
“Madam C.J. Walker, the First Black American Woman to Be a Self-Made Millionaire,” Henry Louis Gates Jr., *The African Americans Many Rivers to Cross*
“The Sharecropper’s Daughter Who Made Black Women Proud of Their Hair,” Hunter Oatman-Stanford, *Collectors Weekly*
Governor Pinckney Benton Stewart Pinchback, 1872, Library of Congress
Jim Crow Era sign, Library of Congress,
“Women’s Suffrage in the Progressive Era,” Library of Congress
Post-Civil War America

After the Civil War, African Americans began assimilating into society.

“Before Sarah Breedlove’s birth, Congress had overridden President Andrew Johnson's veto and adopted the Reconstruction Act, dividing the postwar South into five military districts and enfranchising more than 700,000 black men—most of them newly freed slaves—throughout the eleven states of the former confederacy” (On Her Own Ground).

“A mere thirty-five years after the abolition of slavery, the majority of African Americans had learned to read and hundreds were heading to colleges and universities to continue their studies” (“Booker T. Washington and the Atlanta Compromise”).

“African American men had served with valor in the United States army and navy, and black organizations had come out into the open, playing visible roles in the city’s civic life” (“The Civil War, Reconstruction and the Transformation of African American Life in the 19th Century”).

“Blacks in turn-of-the-century America were excluded from most trade unions and denied bank capital, resulting in trapped lives as sharecroppers or menial, low-wage earners” (“Madam Walker, the First Black American Women to Be a Self-Made Millionaire”).
“One of the only ways out was to start a business in a market segmented by Jim Crow. Hair care and cosmetics fit the bill. The start-up costs were low” ("Madam Walker, the First Black American Women to Be a Self-Made Millionaire").

“Unlike today’s big multinationals, white businesses were slow to respond to blacks’ specific needs. And there was a slew of remedies to improve upon from well before slavery” ("Madam Walker, the First Black American Women to Be a Self-Made Millionaire").

“Black citizens were kept in poverty through violent intimidation and segregation” ("The Sharecropper’s Daughter Who Made Black Women Proud of Their Hair").

“Oh December 31...Pinckney B. S. Pinchback, another black delegate who later would serve as acting lieutenant governor of the state, introduced civil rights legislation outlawing segregation on trains, on ferries and in public places. The Democrats were outraged” (On Her Own Ground).

“Though St. Louis wasn’t devoid of racism, a range of black-owned businesses served its growing African American community, offering far more opportunities than the rigid racial hierarchy in Reconstruction-era Mississippi—where black men were killed in broad daylight for attempting to exercise their new legal rights, like voting” ("The Sharecropper’s Daughter Who Made Black Women Proud of Their Hair").
"She lived on a fascinating threshold between the end of slavery, the beginnings of the great migration northward by African Americans, and the opening up of consumer capitalism" (“Harvard Business School Cases: Beauty Entrepreneur Madam Walker”).

“The prospect of a literate slave population was so frightening to some that an 1830 state law had forbidden teaching them to read and write on pain of imprisonment for one to twelve months” (On Her Own Ground).

“During the early 1900s, when most Americans lacked indoor plumbing and electricity, bathing was a luxury...Sarah and many other women were going bald because they washed their hair so infrequently...” (“Madam Walker, the First Black American Woman to Be a Self-Made Millionaire”).

“Although women began to be employed in business and industry, the majority of better paying positions continued to go to men. At the turn of the century, 60 percent of all working women were employed as domestic servants” (“Women’s Suffrage in the Progressive Era”).

“It was not acceptable in all cities for women to shop by themselves, to be out on the streets actively spending money” (“Harvard Business School Cases: Beauty Entrepreneur Madam Walker”).
Source Credit Text:
“Madam C.J. Walker, the First Black American Woman to Be a Self-Made Millionaire,”
Henry Louis Gates Jr., The African Americans Many Rivers to Cross
Indiana Historical Society, On Her Own Ground, A’Lelia Bundles
Customer letter to Madam Walker, On Her Own Ground, A’Lelia Bundles
American History and Culture, Smithsonian
A’Lelia Walker supervising a facial inside of Madam Walker’s salon, Indiana Historical
Society
Women having their hair styled in Madam Walker’s salon, Museum of the City of New
York, Collectors Weekly
Advertisement for Madam Walker’s products, 1910s, National Museum of African
American History and Culture
Advertisements from National Museum of African American History and Culture
Newspaper advertisement for Madam Walker’s products, Indiana Historical Society
Before-and-after ad, “The Sharecropper’s Daughter Who Made Black Women Proud of
Their Hair,” Hunter Oatman-Stanford, Collectors Weekly
A’Lelia Bundles, Interview with A’Lelia Bundles and Dr. Paul Mullins, Kara Cooper,
Juliana Swartz, Patricia Soldato
Hairstyle model, Indiana Historical Society
Advertisements from Smithsonian
Advertisement for Madam C.J. Walker’s Wonderful Hair Grower, 1917, National
Museum of African American History and Culture
Newspaper advertisement for Madam C.J. Walker’s preparations, Biography
Methods of Success

Sarah Breedlove takes the business world by storm through her marketing genius, communicating directly to her black consumers in order to create a place for African-Americans in the beauty industry for the very first time.

The Products

“A big black man appeared to me and told me what to mix up for my hair. Some of the remedy was grown in Africa, but I sent for it, put it on my scalp, and in a few weeks my hair was coming in faster than it had ever fallen out” (“Madam Walker, the First Black American Woman to Be a Self-Made Millionaire”).

“She had several thousand agents around the country to sell her full line of products for growing and beautifying hair. These included Wonderful Hair Grower, Temple Grower, shampoo, Glossine (pressing oil) and Tetter Salve, a remedy for the scalp” (Indiana Historical Society).

“Before I started using Madam Walker’s Wonderful Hair Grower, my hair was ⅛ of an inch long. Now my hair is down my back and I’ve been able to throw my wig away” (Customer letter to Madam Walker, Bundles).

Advertisements

“Look your best and succeed!” (Madam Walker’s axiom, National Museum of African American History and Culture)

“Made BY colored people - FOR colored people” (National Museum of African American History and Culture).

“Be the Walker type. The way to beauty and success” (National Museum of African American History and Culture).

Madam Walker knew her audience well and marketed accordingly, connecting with customers on a personal level.

“[Madam Walker] was a pioneer at using black women — actually, herself — as the faces in both her before and after shots, when others had typically reserved the latter for white women only (That was the dream, wasn’t it? the photos implied)” (“Madam Walker, the First Black American Woman to be a Self-Made Millionaire”).

“She made a decision early on to put her own image on her product containers and in her advertisements. That helped other people relate to her. They could, in many ways, see themselves” (Bundles).

“A few pennies invested may bring you untold success” (Smithsonian)

“Win the admiration of all” (Smithsonian).
Source Credit Text:
“Madam C.J. Walker,” A’Lelia Bundles, Madam C.J. Walker
Madam C.J. Walker, On Her Own Ground, A’Lelia Bundles
Madam Walker’s Manufacturing Company, 1911, Indiana Historical Society
Madam Walker’s church, Bethel AME Church. National Park Service, Suzanne Rollins
On Her Own Ground, A’Lelia Bundles
“Look Good, Do Good: Madam C.J. Walker and Rihanna’s Beauty Politics,” Tiffany M. Gill, May 21, 2019
“The Sharecropper’s Daughter Who Made Black Women Proud of Their Hair,” Hunter Oatman-Stanford, Collectors Weekly
Madam Walker on her porch, Indiana Historical Society
Dr. Tyrone Freeman, Interview with Dr. Tyrone Freeman, Kara Cooper, Juliana Swartz, Patricia Soldato
A Walker agent, Indiana Historical Society
A’Lelia Bundles, Interview with A’Lelia Bundles and Dr. Paul Mullins, Kara Cooper, Juliana Swartz, Patricia Soldato
Stereopticon advertisement, 1920s, University of Michigan
Dr. Paul Mullins, Interview with A’Lelia Bundles and Dr. Paul Mullins, Kara Cooper, Juliana Swartz, Patricia Soldato
Marketing Strategies

“Her approach to advertising was aggressive; she used proceeds from her sale of her products for advertisements that appeared in African American newspapers as soon as they came in” (“Madam C.J. Walker”).

"My advice to everyone expecting to go into business is to hit often and hit hard; in other words, strike with all your might" (Madam C.J. Walker, On Her Own Ground).

“One of the secrets to Walker’s success was tapping into the remarkably active African American social life that revolved around church... Her church connections also formed the basis of her agent network and helped build word-of-mouth advertising for her products” (“Harvard Business School Cases: Beauty Entrepreneur Madam Walker”).

“Walker’s name change ... was a smart career move that reflected her style and marketing flair ... White people in those days would call African Americans ‘Aunt’ or ‘Uncle’ or by their first name ... They would never address them by their surname ... Madam Walker’s [name change was a] decision to buck the tide in how African Americans were known by whites ... [It] was about signaling her own self-respect and that for other African Americans” (Nancy Koehn, “Harvard Business School Cases: Beauty Entrepreneur Madam Walker”).
“Much of Walker's **ascendancy** as a businesswoman came from her ability to **discern** the kinds of hair products sought by most black women” (A’Lelia Bundles, “Madam C.J. Walker Upward bound”).

“Madam Walker was among those in the forefront who “devised a **national system** of mass production, distribution, marketing, and advertising that transformed local patterns of buying and selling” and “made cosmetics **affordable** and **indispensable to all women**” (On Her Own Ground).

“Walker’s early advertisements emphasized **improved hair health** and **manageability**, not straightened hair. Instead of racist caricatures, she placed her undeniably Black body at the center of her company’s visual narrative. These deliberate choices challenged what Kobena Mercer calls the “ideologies of the beautiful,” aesthetic ideals that relegate Black women, particularly those with Africanized features, outside of its desired norms” (“Look Good, Do Good: Madam C.J. Walker and Rihanna’s Beauty Politics”).

“She was very masterful at using the **media**; she bought **ads** in **black newspapers** all over the country...Moving to Indianapolis was strategic, in that it was the **crossroads of America**, and all the trains passing through meant that it was very easy to ship her products” (A’lelia Bundles, “The Sharecropper’s Daughter Who Made Black Women Proud of Their Hair”).
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“Madam Walker...built up a **strong, recognizable brand**. It was not only across the United States but overseas. She was selling her products in the Caribbean, in South America...She really had his global aspiration. Her story was known. She was all over the Black newspaper’s of the day” (Freeman).

“Along with her husband, she traveled across the country by train to **sell** and **teach women** how to use the hair preparations. Many African American women were using products created specifically for their hair for the **first time** in their lives” (“Madam C.J. Walker”).
“In 1907 Walker and her husband traveled around the South and Southeast promoting her products and giving lecture demonstrations of her "Walker Method" ("Madam C.J. Walker").

“As she was developing her business, she was traveling from city to city. She would make a presentation, a speech, and later, she started using what was called a stereopticon, glass slides which were an early version of powerpoint” (Bundles).

“Madam Walker really targeted her audience. It was about... having healthy hair and, to some degree, understanding that there was this pressure with the European standards of beauty” (Bundles).

“She had very good instincts for people. She was very skilled at reading people, understanding their ambitions, and making them feel loved...also motivating them to pursue their ambitions. For many working class people across time, it’s been very difficult to step out of the life that you’ve been structurally given” (Mullins).

“She put faith in women who had had very little faith put in them by anybody else, at a moment where it was very difficult for women of color to do anything else” (Mullins).
“Look Good, Do Good: Madam C.J. Walker and Rihanna’s Beauty Politics,” Tiffany M. Gill, May 21, 2019

“Madam C.J. Walker, the First Black American Woman to Be a Self-Made Millionaire,” Henry Louis Gates Jr., The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross

On Her Own Ground, A’Lelia Bundles

F.B. Ransom to Madam C.J. Walker, On Her Own Ground, A’Lelia Bundles

Portrait of F. B. Ransom, Black Moment

Mr. Thompson, On Her Own Ground, A’Lelia Bundles

Kinston, Jamaica, 1890, Library of Congress
Supporters and Critics

“Some race leaders...accused Walker of promoting a Eurocentric beauty ideal” ("Look Good, Do Good: Madam C.J. Walker and Rihanna’s Beauty Politics").

“Sarah’s industry had its critics, among them the leading black institution-builder of the day, Booker T. Washington, who worried (to his credit) that hair-straighteners (and, worse, skin-bleaching creams) would lead to the internalization of white concepts of beauty” ("Madam Walker, the First Black American Woman to Be a Self-Made Millionaire").

“In seeking to banish hair care ads from the newspapers he controlled, Washington had failed to grasp a changing trend affecting American women and their relationship with the nation’s marketplace” (On Her Own Ground).

“Madam Walker initially found it difficult to find retailers willing to sell her products, so she hired Black women to serve as sales agents and sent them to the places where Black women were already gathering—beauty salons, churches, and club meetings” ("Look Good, Do Good: Madam C.J. Walker and Rihanna’s Beauty Politics").
“I think you are the **money-making wonder** of the age” (F. B. Ransom to Madam C.J. Walker, *On Her Own Ground*).

“Mme Walker is essentially a **businesswoman**... She never loses an opportunity to emphasize to her sisters the importance of their getting into the world of business...making themselves **financially independent** and **setting an example** for all people of thrift, industry and practical application of their mental training” (Thompson, a Washington disciple, *On Her Own Ground*).

““In Kingston, Madam Walker was greeted enthusiastically as “businessmen and high officials vied with one another and extended to her the **hospitality** of their **country**”’ (*On Her Own Ground*).

The YMCA ‘declared that this “**benefactress in human uplift**...has enshrined herself into the hearts of all her fellow citizens.” Praising “her marvelous business ability” and “immense wealth”’ (*On Her Own Ground*).
Making a Mark

Madam C.J. Walker utilizes her newfound wealth and influence to advocate for issues she could personally relate to, such as racial justice, gender equality, education, and entrepreneurial independence.

Walker’s Activism and Philanthropy

“[Philanthropy] was really fundamental to her identity...Being of service to her race and providing opportunities for Black women was very important to her” (Freeman)

“Walker had been active in political, social, and charitable organizations....She lent her voice to political causes on local, national, and international scales, campaigning for the fair treatment of black soldiers, the decolonization of Africa, and an end to black oppression in the South” (“Harvard Business School Cases: Beauty Entrepreneur Madam Walker”).

“Her philanthropic giving was focused on racial uplift, which meant helping African Americans overcome Jim Crow and achieve full citizenship” (Dr. Tyrone Freeman, Madam C.J. Walker’s Philanthropy”).

“Education is key for freedom. She wanted to support...schools to make sure African Americans had access to it” (Freeman).
“She also supported **social service agencies** and **organizations** that were providing for various needs among African Americans. She gave to some orphanages and some old folks’ homes. These were important institutions because...the ones that were run by white Americans...would not accept Black children or Black elderly...She could relate very strongly. She was an orphan. **She knows that struggle and that pain**” (Freeman).

“There’s an organization in Indianapolis called **Flanner House**. It still exists to this day, that she supported and she gave money to. She was a very **vocal supporter**. They provided a lot of education, social services, job development...for African Americans” (Freeman).

“The YMCA and the YWCA...provided shelter and access to basic needs. There was a campaign to build one in Indianapolis and Madam Walker gave the largest gift by an individual from the city of $1000 to help build it...She thought it would be helpful to Black men and boys and that it would **pave the way** for a YWCA for **Black women** and **Black girls**. A few years later, it did, and Madam Walker was a part of that process as well” (Freeman).

“She gave regularly to her church. The most important organization within her church that she supported was the **Might Missionary Society**...an organization of women...who did charitable work in the community...and when Sarah Breedlove came to St. Louis in 1889, a widowed, orphaned, single mother, it was the Might Missionary Society...that helped her get on her feet. That’s also where she **learned to start giving too**. She never really had anything, but it was those women of the church who helped her see that she had a **responsibility** to do something to **help others**” (Freeman).
“As she began to make more money, she was well known for giving...She gave 1000 dollars to the building fund of the YMCA, as well as black colleges and black schools, YWCAs, orphanages, and retirement homes -Though the largest gift that she gave was 5000 dollars to NAACP’s anit-lynching fund” (Bundles).

“Lynching was a very important issues for her. She organized her agents into clubs...all over the country, and she began bringing them together into annual conference meetings in 1917. The first one was in Philadelphia at a church. During the convention, they wrote out a resolution, drawing attention to lynching and asking President Woodrow Wilson to pass legislation to protect Black life” (Tyone Freeman).

“She also played a role in suffrage. There are newspaper accounts of her having to organize a meeting of the Equal Suffrage Association, which was an organization run by White women, but they started a Black branch. Madam Walker convened that meeting at her house” (Freeman).

“She eventually moves in circles with the leading Black leaders of the day. Not only Booker T. Washington, but Mary Church Terrell, who’s the head of the National Association of Colored Women, Marcus Garvey, who’s running the Universal Negro Improvement Association Movement out of New York, A. Philip Randall, who’s a labor leader...She’s in the mix and she’s well known. People love her story” (Freeman).
“She also had this program where she would give you money to renovate and start your own salon...These are women, who instead of cleaning people’s houses, get to own their own business...She develops a whole base of entrepreneurial women who are able to provide for themselves and their families, but are also very active in the struggle for freedom, racial justice, and gender justice. **The two went hand in hand**...The **business** has this **moral imperative**, that we’re doing this to make a difference” (Freeman).

"I was promoted to the cook kitchen, and from there I promoted myself into the business of manufacturing hair goods and preparations. ... I am not ashamed of my humble beginning. Don’t think because you have to go down in the wash-tub that you are any less a lady!” (Madam CJ Walker, “Harvard Business School Cases: Beauty Entrepreneur Madam Walker”).

**Expanding the Beauty Market**

“It took a long time for the very large, and the dominant white-owned cosmetics companies, even in our time, to really pay attention to women of color. A lot of the shades and colorings were really focused on white women, but now, there are so many **different colors**, from nail polish to facial foundations. Pretty much any woman can find the right tone for herself...Madam Walker is part of that **push** and that **revolution**” (Freeman).

“**In a Jim Crow world** that’s sending these negative messages that African Americans are not human, they’re less than, or inferior, here’s Madam Walker...saying **“no, you’re beautiful**,” and here’s some **products meant for you**, so you can present yourself to the world with the dignity that you feel you should have”” (Freeman).
Source Credit Text:
“You Can Buy Madam C.J. Walker’s Hair Care Products Today,” McKenzie Jean-Phillips, *The Oprah Magazine*
A’Lelia Bundles, “Madam C.J. Walker Beauty Culture - An International Tribute to the Original Hair Care Millionaire”
Madam C.J. Walker Beauty Culture line advertisement, Sephora, Madam C.J. Walker Beauty Culture
Fenty Beauty Advertisement, 2017, Allure
“Look Good, Do Good: Madam C.J. Walker and Rihanna’s Beauty Politics,” Tiffany M. Gill, May 21, 2019
Madam C.J. Walker Cosmetics Today

“With the approval of A’Lelia Bundles...Sundial Brands...bought Madam C.J. Walker Enterprises in 2013. They first re-launched Madam C.J. Walker Beauty Culture in 2016, and then again in 2019 with a line that offers eight new products. The selection includes moisturizing jelly shampoo, texture definition cream, styling serum, and scalp restoring treatment” (“You Can Buy Madam C.J. Walker's Hair Care Products Today”).

“Madam Walker emphasized the importance of healthy hair—whether curly-kinky, straight, wavy, or in-between—each style beautiful in its own uniqueness...every woman can have healthier hair while also confidently expressing her beauty in the best way possible—hers” (A’Lelia Walker, “Madam C.J. Walker Beauty Culture – An international Tribute to the Original Hair Care Millionaire”).

“Since Walker's initial creations were introduced in the early 1900s, significant advancements and discoveries have been made in the world of Black hair care...the formulas are not the same...However, the company’s ethos still aligns with Madam Walker's initial goal of providing high quality products to promote the health and growth of African American women’s natural hair” (“You Can Buy Madam C.J. Walker’s Hair Care Products Today”).
Modern Black-Owned Cosmetics: Fenty Beauty

“There would be no Fenty Beauty if not for the work Walker did over a century ago to expand the contours of the beauty industry to meet the demands of Black women consumers” (“Look Good, Do Good: Madam C.J. Walker and Rihanna’s Beauty Politics”).

“Boasting over 40 shades of foundation to complement a diverse range of skin tones, Fenty Beauty earned a staggering $72 million in sales in its first month and was named one of the 25 Best Inventions of 2017 by Time Magazine. Beauty brands that had previously ignored Black women consumers scrambled to figure out how to tap into what they now realized was a lucrative market” (“Look Good, Do Good: Madam C.J. Walker and Rihanna’s Beauty Politics”).

“I hope that Rihanna, who has already demonstrated a commitment to philanthropy and education—two issues Madam Walker championed—will capitalize on the emotional connection Black women have with her brand to help create a more beautiful future” (Tiffany M. Gill, “Look Good, Do Good: Madam C.J. Walker and Rihanna’s Beauty Politics”)
“After she died, people were just heartbroken. So many of them, in their telegrams, referenced how much she meant to them and how much they valued her philanthropy. They saw her as a powerful example. One of the words they kept using was that she was so useful to the race. She was so beneficial to the race because she carried this idea of liberation and racial uplift” (Freeman).

“During an era when African Americans were believed to be incapable of developing their own communities, she had refuted the stereotype that blacks could not be successful in business” (On Her Own Ground).

“Women who had earned little more than a few dollars a week as domestic workers now took in two and three and ten times that much in one day” (On Her Own Ground).

“I made it. That is why I want to say to every Negro woman...don’t sit down and wait for the opportunities to come, but you have to get up and make them!” (Madam C.J. Walker, On Her Own Ground).

“There are many Black women in business today who look to her...as great models of inspiration” (Freeman).
‘Madam C.J. Walker “represents **black women's daily ways** of giving in their communities to survive in America, and to express and preserve their dignity and humanity. She is an important **historical marker** of the long-standing and deep-rootedness of African American philanthropy—it is not new and emerging. It predated Walker, and it vibrantly continues to this day” (Dr. Tyrone Freeman, “Madam C.J. Walker’s Philanthropy”).

“Despite how proud she was of their financial success, ‘their **first duty is to humanity**.’ She further explained, ‘I shall expect to find my agents taking the lead in every locality not only in operating a successful business, but in every movement in the **interest of our colored citizenship**’...Generations of sales agents and beauticians would follow in their footsteps by serving as leaders and key mobilizers in various iterations of the Black freedom struggle” (Madam Walker, Look Good, Do Good: Madam C.J. Walker and Rihanna’s Beauty Politics).

“In 1952...Walter White, who was the head of the NAACP at the time, was participating in a memorial service for Madam Walker, in New York...and according to newspaper accounts of the event, he said that **if it was not for Madam Walker’s generosity**, the **NAACP** would not have survived **the Depression**” (Freeman).

“One of the things that I try to get people to see is: don’t focus on her being a millionaire because she started giving when she was poor in her 20’s, and **struggling herself**” (Freeman).
“Even when she was a washerwoman, she said: ‘I wanted to be the best washerwoman I could be’, and she took pride in [her work]” (Bundles).

“What if all of us, instead of thinking of philanthropy as something that Bill Gates does, or others do, because they are millionaires, what if all of us thought about what we could do to help others with whatever we had; a few dollars, a helping hand, a few hours?...We could dramatically change things, and Madam Walker very much represents that generosity” (Freeman).

Through her targeted marketing and philanthropic work, Madam C.J. Walker changed the game for Black women in the business world, forming a personal connection with her consumers and creating thousands of opportunities for economic independence.