

Black History Essay

Madam C.J. Walker

Did you know that Madam C.J. Walker was the first African American female self-made millionaire? Walker's rise to wealth demonstrates African American persistence and entrepreneurship. That is why I am going to be writing about her life, contributions, success, and impacts on the community.

Sarah Breedlove, formally known as Madam C.J. Walker was born on a plantation close to Delta, Louisiana on December 23, 1867. She was orphaned at age of seven by her older sister Louvenia and lived with her. She had very little formal education as a child, but possibly at her family's small church. The two worked in the cotton fields partly to escape her abusive brother-in-law. At the age of fourteen Walker married Moses McWilliams. Then when her husband died in 1887, Walker became a single mother to two-year-old daughter Lelia. Pursuing her way out of hardship, in 1889, Walker moved to St. Louis, Missouri, where her four brothers were barbers. There, she worked as a laundress and cook. She also joined the African Methodist Episcopal Church, where she met leading black men and women, whose education and success likewise inspired her. Then in 1894, she married John Davis, but the marriage was troubled, and the couple later divorced. Struggling financially, facing hair loss, and feeling the strain of years of physical labor, Walker's life took a dramatic turn in 1904.

In 1904, she not only began using African American businesswoman Annie Turbo Malone's "The Great Wonderful Hair Grower," but she also joined Malone's team of black women sales agents. A year later, Walker moved to Denver, Colorado and she married Charles Joseph Walker then renamed herself "Madam C.J. Walker". After that with \$1.25, she launched her own line of hair products and straighteners for African American women called "Madam Walker's Wonderful Hair Grower. Walker's business grew rapidly, with sales exceeding \$500,000 in the final year of her life. Her total worth topped \$1 million dollars, and included a mansion in Irvington, New York named "Villa Lewaro," and properties in Harlem, Chicago, Pittsburgh, and St. Louis. As her wealth increased, so did her philanthropic and political outreach. One of her impacts on the community was when she employed 40,000 African American women and men in the U.S. Central America and the Caribbean. Walker additionally contributed to the YMCA, covered tuition for six African American students at Tuskegee Institute, and became active in the anti-lynching movement; donating \$5,000 to the NAACP's efforts. But just prior to dying of kidney failure, Walker altered her will, passing on two-thirds of future net profits to charity, in addition to thousands of dollars given to many individuals and schools.

I think more support can be given to minority entrepreneurs; By experienced people offering skills, and introducing them to their network or sharing valuable business resources. Mentorship can provide Black businesses with the guidance, confidence and skills they need to successfully navigate the challenges of entrepreneurship. They can

also mention their business in community events as well as, shop at their businesses to support them.

Madam C.J. Walker did a lot of things that impact the community and the world. She showed that no matter who you are and where you are from you can do whatever is up to your abilities. These are the reasons why I chose her for my black history month essay.