

Life and Achievements of Madame C.J. Walker

Janet Powers

New Life Fellowship

December 17, 2017

### **Biographical Information**

The origins of African American focus on hair care and styling can be traced back centuries to the year 1444 when while trading, Europeans encountered West Africans with beautiful braiding styles and plaits, (Thirsty Roots, 2016). Although this may have been the first documented encounter with these hairstyles, the origins of caring for black hair can be probably be traced back quite a bit of time before this. African American men and women place great value on their hair and many consider it an honor to have someone label their hair as “good.” One of the pioneers of hair styling, care and maintenance is Madame C.J. Walker. Walker, (originally named Sarah Breedlove), was born on December 23, 1867, on a Louisiana plantation to Owen and Minerva Anderson Breedlove, (Biography Editors, 2017). Walker also had four other siblings, but Walker was the only sibling to be born free at that time. Tragedy struck her home when at the age of seven her mother and father passed away from unknown causes and Walker had to move in with her sister Louvina and her brother in law to Mississippi. Walker endured several years of mistreatment by her brother in law and was forced to move away and get married by the age of 14 to a man named Moses McWilliams. She and her husband would later have a child named A’lalei. Tragedy struck again when her then-husband died which led to her and her daughter moving to St. Louis, MO. While there, she worked as a washwoman and met and married her husband Charles J. Walker. Although Charles provided a great deal of support in her early years in business, they eventually divorced in 1913. It was Charles who convinced her to change her name to Madam C.J. in an attempt to be recognized in their local community. Walker lived a full and inspiring life before her death of Hypertension in 1919, (Biography Editors, 2017).

### **Achievements and Contributions**

Walker achieved several accomplishments and earned her the titles activist, Philanthropist, and entrepreneur. The reasons are outlined below:

- In 1907, Walker developed the “Walker Method” of her care which involved using a self-designed pomade, brushing, and styling with a hot comb after dealing with scalp disorder for several years, (Biography Editors, 2017).
- In 1908, Walker opened both a factory and a beauty school in Pittsburgh, (and would later set up her headquarters in Minneapolis), which employed “Walker agents” who would train beauticians and make cosmetics for African Americans, (Biography Editors, 2017).
- She would use the profits from these businesses to fund homes for the elderly, established scholarship funds, and made substantial donations to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, (NAACP), and the National Conference on Lynching.
- She visited the White House to call for President Wilson to make lynching a crime in the United States of America.
- She donated money for the COstruction of the Indianapolis YMCA and helped improve the lives of many African Americans in her community and across the world.
- Walker became the first African American woman to be a millionaire who was self-made. (Biography Editors, 2017)

### **Belief**

Walker was a deeply religious person and research shows that she served the Lord in an

African Methodist Episcopal Church, (Lewis, 2017).

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, Walker's innovation and legacy still live on not only in the care and attention taken on African American hair but also through her generosity and activism she performed in her community. She fought for the rights of African Americans and her donations and time had significant impacts on the black community. Her legacy will long be remembered in African American history and her courage and dedication honored.

**Reference(s):**

Biography Editors. (2017). Madame C.J. Walker. Retrieved from

<https://www.biography.com/people/madam-cj-walker-9522174>

Lewis, J. (2017). Madame C.J. Walker: inventor, entrepreneur, philanthropist. Retrieved from

<https://www.thoughtco.com/madam-c-j-walker-biography-3528600>

Thirsty Roots. (2016). Black hair history. Retrieved from

<http://thirstyroots.com/black-hair-history/discovering-our-roots-do-i-hate-my-hair>