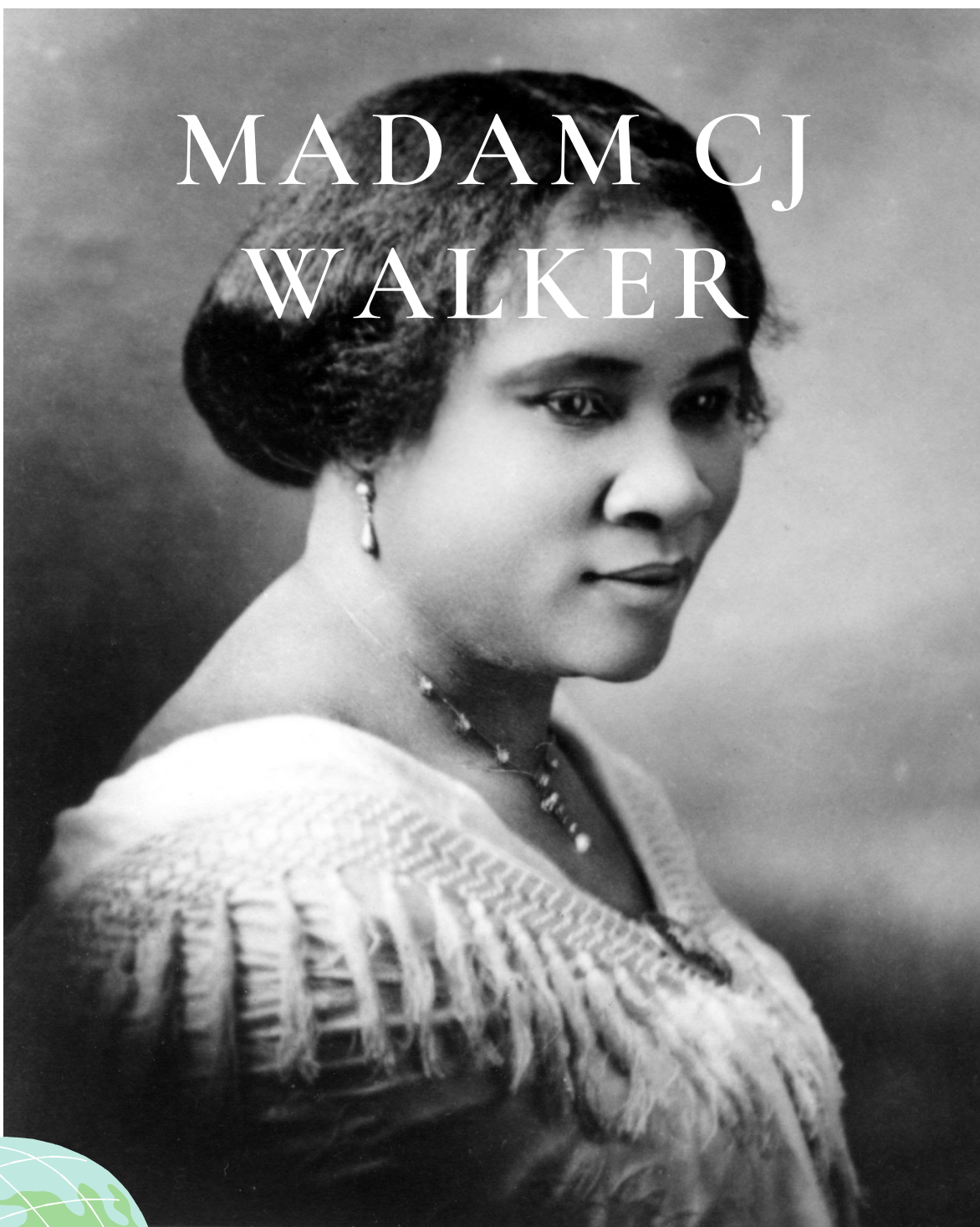


# MADAM CJ WALKER



## UNVEILED HISTORY

# Madam CJ Walker

## Before Reading

Cornelius Vanderbilt, John D. Rockefeller, and Andrew Carnegie are all notorious for their wealth and success in the railroad, oil, and steel industries. Similarly, another successful entrepreneur, Madam CJ Walker, pioneered an industry of her own—hair care!

## Early Life

Madam CJ Walker was the first Black female millionaire in America and was known for her homemade hair care products for Black women. Madam CJ Walker, or Sarah Breedlove, was born on December 23, 1867 to former enslaved sharecroppers. Born after the Emancipation Proclamation, she was the first in her family to be born free but suffered an extremely difficult childhood nonetheless; she was orphaned at the age of six and married by the age of 14.



### Check it Out!

Watch "Self Made on Netflix!

After getting married, giving birth to her daughter A'Lelia, and becoming widowed at 20, Walker moved to St. Louis, where she attended night school while working as a laundress. As she became involved with the National Association of Colored Women, she met Charles J. Walker, who would soon become her second husband and whose name became the inspiration of her brand name.

## Building an Empire

After dealing with a scalp disorder that affected her own hair growth, Walker trademarked her “Walker System”, which included scalp preparations, lotions, and iron crumbs.

Though her business started small and she initially had trouble selling products, her determination and personal marketing style gained her a loyal customer base, allowing her to create an empire of her own. After all, Madam CJ Walker fit an incredibly sought out need: hair care products for Black women by Black women. This was different as many other products “designed” for Black women were produced by white-owned companies that did not suit their needs. It drew national attention and became extremely popular!

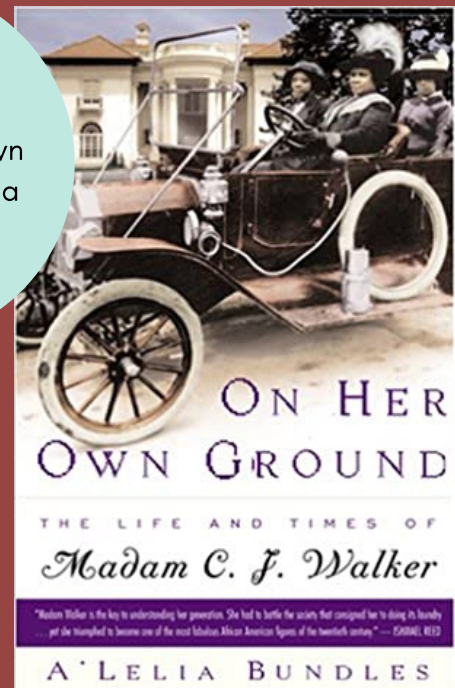


### Check it Out!

Read “On Her Own Ground” by A'Lelia Bundles

### Think About it!

Why may it be that Madam CJ Walker is not very well-known and is often overlooked?



Soon afterwards, she began employing sales women to assist in the selling of her product. She dubbed these women “beauty culturalists”. As her business continued to grow she opened a beauty school and a factory in Pittsburgh. She also moved the headquarters of her business to Indianapolis to appeal to a larger black community and access the railroads for product distribution, all the while employing and empowering other members of the Black community.



Madam CJ Walker understood the struggles of Black people in the U.S. and frequently gave back to her community. She provided her employees with many benefits, such as establishing clubs for them, giving them bonuses when they gave back to the community, and heavily promoting Black female leaders at a time when job opportunities for Black women were limited. She donated heavily to Black institutions and organizations, such as the NAACP, the Black YMCA, and many other organizations assisting the Black community. She also funded scholarships for women at the Tuskegee Institute.

### Think About it!

If Madam CJ Walker was recognized in our present day, how would it influence the current lack of knowledge of black hair care in the cosmetics and entertainment industries?

### Her Legacy

CJ Walker contributed to the black community in a multitude of ways beyond hair care. She allowed her villa to be a place of gathering for political and social activity, she gave black woman the opportunity to take charge of their lives and lead others, an unfortunate rarity at the time. She was an inspiring mother, friend, entrepreneur, and philanthropist who left society at the time incredulous, her success unrestrained by gender roles, racial discrimination, and the grips of poverty as an orphan at an early age.

### Sources

History.com  
Brittanica



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