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Opinion

Where is the Madam C.J. Walker of Today?

Women entrepreneurs have a powerful role model when they consider Madam C.J. Walker. One of our nation's first female self-made millionaires, her story of combining herbs to develop and manufacture a hair pomade, of empowering tens of thousands of women as sales agents for her products, and of establishing a beauty school to teach beauty techniques (and provide economic empowerment for even more women) are the stuff of legend.

She was not only an entrepreneur, but also a philanthropist. She "lived large," owning two cars and a sprawling estate, Villa Lewaro in Irvington, New York, but she shared her wealth. She was possessed with an amazing self-confidence that served her well in business and in life.

Madam — as she is called by her great-granddaughter, A'Le'lia Bundles, the keeper of the family history and author of several books about her ancestor — was a character! She changed her name from Sarah Breedlove to Madam C.J. Walker to provide herself with a "classier" sounding name, and to help prevent white people from calling her "Aunt", as they called so many African American women.



Julianne Malveaux

NNPA
Columnist

For years, she sought the opportunity to speak at Booker T. Washington's National Business League, but was denied. As legend goes, she went to one of the meetings and took the mic and made her speech, despite official denial.

Perhaps Booker T. Washing-

“As legend goes, she went to one of the meetings and took the mic and made her speech, despite official denial

ton was being sexist, or perhaps (it is sometimes said) he had an ideological opposition to a woman whose product was perceived as straightening hair. (By the way, Walker did not invent the straightening comb. Annie Malone, who preceded Madam Walker in making her fortune with beauty products and a beauty school that Walker attended, invented the straightening comb.)

Still, she had the audacity to take the mic and say her piece. She noted that she had pro-

moted herself from a washer-woman to a businesswoman, speaking to the fact that few were available to help her to achieve her goals and the goals of tens of thousands of other women.

Her audacity, her self-possession, her activism were notable during a time when few women, regardless of race, promoted themselves, instead choosing to walk softly and speak quietly. Today, women like Cathy Liggins Hughes (TV/Radio One), Sheila Johnson (co-founder of BET), and Oprah Winfrey stand on her

times. You may have heard that there has been an economic recovery, but if you are like most people in these United States, you haven't felt it.

Incomes have hardly risen since 2009, and barriers to employment entry are high, especially for some young African Americans who, despite similar qualifications to their White counterparts, take much longer to find meaningful and remunerative work.

If the labor market won't absorb these young people, African American entrepreneurs, the inheritors of Madam C.J. Walker, must.

Younger women, especially, are motivated by job markets that they perceive to be unwelcoming. While our colleges teach some educational fundamentals, they ought also be encouraged to teach entrepreneurship.

If the job market continues to generate an official Black unemployment rate of around 10 percent, and an employment population ratio of 60 percent (which means that just 60 percent of the adult population is working — it is closer to 70 percent for whites, then the need for Black entrepreneurs is critical. In the name of Madam C.J. Walker, let's keep our entrepreneurial gene thriving!

What I Learned from the Rise and Fall of the Black Panthers

When Beyoncé gave tribute to the 50th Anniversary of the start of the Black Panther Movement, I thought, "She doesn't know what she is celebrating."

A look back at the years of the Black Panthers demands attention to other groups who equally tried to force this nation into equal rights for all — especially Blacks. America was about to change one way or the other.

In the late 1960s, the anti-war movement, frustration with discrimination and lost faith in our political system caused many groups to form. Groups that were anti-establishment. One particular Black group was formed in Oakland, California.

It was the Black Panther People's Party then shortly changed to the Black Panther Party. Its foundation was to follow socialist/Marxist doctrine and to protect and govern their own communities. They carried weapons, called police "pigs," wore black leather jackets with black berets fitted over their afro and promoted revolution.

Violent skirmishes with the police started becoming frequent as their chapters started popping up in cities



Harry C. Alford

NNPA
Columnist

throughout the United States. Some members of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) decided to become violent and join the Panthers. Most notably Stoke-

“Violent skirmishes with the police started becoming frequent as their chapters started popping up in cities throughout the United States

ly Carmichael (author of the term Black Power) and H. Rap Brown.

I was going to Ventura Community College near my hometown of Oxnard, California. Suddenly, members of the Black Panther Party — Los Angeles Chapter came on our campus to recruit Black students into the movement. Amazingly, they succeeded. Gwen Harvey, fellow student, was the first in our community to grow a "natural" or Afro. I laughed at her for a

full hour. Two years later everyone else was sporting one, and so was I. I even bought a black leather coat.

What I didn't know was that Gwen had joined the Black Panthers. A couple of years later, while I was at the University of Wisconsin, my mother sent me a local news article. Gwen, who was going to the University of California at Santa Barbara, joined a fellow Black Panther and hijacked a commercial jet tak-

ography, Elaine Brown clearly discusses the adventures and soon deterioration of the Panthers through J. Edgar Hoover's infamous COINTELPRO investigations and assassinations. If you want to know about life with the Panthers and how vicious a nation can be, this is a must-read.

While I was attending the University of Wisconsin, I had the opportunity to meet and quickly chat with Fred Hampton, who ran the Chicago's Black Panther chapter.

He gave a rousing speech at an event sponsored by a White communist organization — Students for a Democratic Society (SDS).

My buddy and I were so intrigued we decided to drive to Chicago, go to his headquarters and request an on the spot interview and then write a paper for one of our professors. Fred took us in! The brother had the makings of a great leader.

A few weeks later the Chicago Police Department assassinated him via a couple of dozen bullets as he laid in his bed beside wife, who was eight months pregnant.

It was devastating! It was a hard lesson for me. Fight the power, but remember the power follows no morals.