

Unique Black Women Cont'd.



Maggie L. Draper Walker

love of their people, not for fame or money, for money was often hard to come by in the families that most of these schools serviced. Realizing that money, or the lack of it, was often an issue of mountainous proportions, these tireless women were determined that their people would acquire skills to enable them to become self-supporting.

Once this was achieved, the next logical step would be to provide the ability to maintain some semblance of solvency and plan for the future through systematic saving.

The earliest savings institutions for Blacks were part of fraternal organizations or churches, and the monies were often used for sickness or burial - the forerunners of the modern insurance industry. Some free Blacks were able to use their money to make investments or they became lenders. Much money was placed in real estate, for Blacks have always been interested in owning their lands for a feeling of permanence or roots.

When the Civil War ended, the Freedman's Bank was established by Congress in 1865. When it failed nine years later, over 70,000 Blacks lost their money.

In Richmond, VA., a fraternal order, the Independent Order of St. Luke, had as a member **Maggie L. Walker**. Recognizing the need for a systematic savings program, she organized St. Luke's Penny Savings Bank, and encouraged Black investors to make regular, albeit small, deposits.



Madame C.J. Walker

In 1903, the name was changed to St. Luke's Bank and Trust Co., and Mrs. Walker became the first female bank president in America, Black or white. Maggie L. Draper Walker, born the daughter of a former slave in 1867, was active in other affairs: she established the newspaper **The St. Luke Herald**, was a partner in an unsuccessful department store-her only failure-founded The Richmond Independent School for Girls, and helped to establish a Black health care center.

The bank which she founded merged with another Black bank in Richmond and became the Consolidated Bank and Trust Co. with Mrs. Walker as its board chairman until she died in 1935.

Business acumen also exhibited by a woman whose name has been synonymous with beauty. Born in Delta, La. in 1875 to poor ex-slave parents; orphaned and married at fourteen, she was widowed at twenty with a young child to raise along. She then moved to St. Louis where she supported herself and her daughter by doing laundry. There, she met and married a newspaper man, Charles J. Walker.

Madame C.J. Walker, as she became known, developed and manufactured cosmetics which she first began selling door-to-door through the South and Midwest. She invented the "hot comb" and hair straightening process which initially brought her ridicule, but with which she eventually became the first Black millionairess.

Through her schools and correspondence course in beauty culture, she became the first Black person in the modern world to develop a large manufacturing business.

Mme. Walker had great admiration for educators and became a patron of six black youths every year whom she would send to Tuskegee. In addition, she donated thousands of dollars annually to indigent youths for college educations at other institutions. She offered Mrs. Bethune her friendship and funding for the college. Dismayed by the lynchings that were sweeping the country, she donated five thousand dollars to the National Council on Lynching. This remarkable woman died in 1919.

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===== **LORRAINE HANSBERRY** . . . While still in her 20's, Lorraine Hansberry wrote "A Raisin in the Sun," a play about a Black family in Chicago. It won the New York Drama Critics award as the best play of 1959. Her career was cut short when she died of cancer at the age of 35. After her death, a collection of her writings was published entitled, "To Be Young, Gifted and Black." =====



Marian Anderson

--was the first Black to appear in a major role at the N.Y. Met in the Opera Aida. She retired in 1965 after an illustrious career.

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