

GOSPEL OF GIVING:
THE PHILANTHROPY OF MADAM C.J. WALKER, 1867-1919

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DEDICATION

In memory of my grandparents,
Roscoe & Virginia Cooper and David & Ruth Freeman.

In honor of my wife and children,
Michelle, Alexander, and Olivia.

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This dissertation employs a historical approach to the philanthropic activities of Madam C.J. Walker, an African American female entrepreneur who built an international beauty culture company that employed thousands of people, primarily black women, and generated hundreds of thousands of dollars in annual revenues during the Jim Crow era. The field of philanthropic studies has recognized Walker as a philanthropist, but has not effectively accounted for how her story challenges conventional understandings of philanthropy. I use historical methods and archival research to determine what motivated and constituted Walker's philanthropic giving to arrive at three main conclusions. First, Walker's philanthropy can be best understood as emerging out of a moral imagination forged by her experiences as a poor, black, female migrant in St. Louis, Missouri during the late 1800s dependent upon a robust philanthropic infrastructure of black civil society institutions and individuals who cared for and mentored her through the most difficult period of her life. Second, she created and operated her company to pursue commercial and philanthropic goals concurrently by improving black women's personal hygiene and appearance; increasing their access to vocational education, beauty culture careers, and financial independence; and promoting social bonding and activism through associationalism, and, later, fraternal ritual. Third, during her lifetime and through her estate, Walker deployed a diverse array of philanthropic resources to fund African American social service and educational needs in networks with other black women. Her

giving positions her philanthropy as simultaneously distinct from the dominant paradigm of wealthy whites and as shared with that of other African Americans. Her approach thus ran counter to the racialized and gendered models of giving by the rich white male and female philanthropists of her era, while being representative of black women's norms of giving.

Nancy Marie Robertson, Ph.D., Chair

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INTRODUCTION:

SEARCHING FOR MADAM C.J. WALKER'S PHILANTHROPY

“Few races are more instinctively philanthropic than the Negro.
It is shown in everyday life and in their group history.
Some few of their larger philanthropies in America in
early days have been recorded.”
–W.E.B. Du Bois (1909)¹

Between 1905 and 1919, Sarah Breedlove (1867-1919), a black woman who was born to former slaves and worked as a laundress during her young adult years, founded her own hair care and beauty products manufacturing company and incorporated philanthropic giving into her business operations. With holdings and investments approaching \$1 million in value, her company's success made her one of the wealthiest black woman in the country and caused her to become known as the first “self-made” millionaire woman. Adopting the initials and surname of her third husband, Charles Joseph Walker, Breedlove forged an entrepreneurial and philanthropic identity as “Madam C.J. Walker” and directed her giving to black social service and educational causes dear to her and important to her business. Philanthropy was not only an outward act of benevolence for Madam Walker; it was an organizing principle for her business, as she mobilized her national army of sales agents into benevolent associations and charged them with selling hair care products and giving to charity in their local communities. Racial uplift and independence for black women were Walker's guiding philosophies and she used philanthropy to express them throughout her life and through her company. She died in 1919 at the age of 51.

¹ W.E.B. Du Bois, *Efforts for Social Betterment among Negro Americans* (Atlanta: Atlanta University Press, 1909), 37.

Despite her unusual wealth, Walker was still black, still female, and still limited in many ways by the prevailing social, political, and economic caste system that constrained opportunity for African Americans in the early twentieth century. Indeed, her wealth enabled her to occupy the privileged echelon of black society, as exhibited by her ownership of multiple properties across the country and personal automobiles. However, this was a marginalized and oppressed black world, dramatically different than the white mainstream world.

Today's mainstream historical interpretation of women's philanthropy—which is based predominantly upon the experience of elite white women—often neglects and overlooks racial and class differences among women in the United States. While this interpretation may be useful for understanding how philanthropy helped to redefine gender by opening up public spaces for elite and middle-class white female agency in a male-dominated world, it does not fully explain the experiences of women who were marginalized for not only their gender, but also their race or class status or both. Given the historical complexity of American society, this mainstream interpretation offers little insight into the philanthropy of working-class white women and renders invisible racial and ethnic minority women of varying class statuses, particularly African Americans. While some historians have fallen into the temptation of using elite white women's social experience to explain all women's social experience, donors of different races, classes, and genders engaged philanthropy in specific ways.² Since African American philanthropy, in particular, developed differently than white benevolence due to the experiences of slavery and oppression, it is essential to examine the role of black women

² Laura Tuennerman-Kaplan, *Helping Others Helping Ourselves: Power, Giving, and Community Identity in Cleveland, Ohio, 1880-1930* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2001).

in creating their own institutions and preserving their own communities especially since this work is already being done for white women.³

To be sure, this work is well underway when it comes to black women. Since the 1960s and 1970s, an extraordinary historical literature on black women has evolved as has the field of black women's history. Because philanthropic giving, volunteerism, associations, and social activism are important for understanding black women's history, there are several works that have examined such phenomena.⁴ But this literature and its influence has not yet fully penetrated the burgeoning field of philanthropic studies, which describes itself as being interdisciplinary because philanthropy is a multi-faceted human phenomena that can be understood best in a comprehensive manner by engaging multiple perspectives.⁵

This study engages primary sources and diverse historiographies to expose how race, class, and gender shaped the philanthropy of Madam C.J. Walker, as a prominent black woman entrepreneur in the early twentieth century, who heretofore has been largely left out of traditional historical narratives about American philanthropy despite her remarkable achievements.

³ Jayne R. Bielke, "Nineteenth-Century Traditions of Benevolence and Education: Toward a Conceptual Framework of Black Philanthropy," in *Uplifting a People: African American Philanthropy and Education*, eds., Marybeth Gasman and Katherine V. Sedgwick (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), 9-24; Marybeth Gasman and Katherine Sedgwick, eds. *Uplifting a People: African American Philanthropy and Education* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005).

⁴ Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (New York: Bantam Books, 1984); Cynthia Neverdon-Morton, *Afro-American Women of the South and the Advancement of the Race, 1825-1925* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989); Darlene Clark Hine, *Hine Sight: Black Women and the Re-Construction of American History* (Brooklyn, NY: Carlson Publishing, 1994); Deborah Gray White, *Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves 1894-1994* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999); Floris Barnett Cash, *African American Women and Social Action: The Clubwomen and Volunteerism from Jim Crow to the New Deal, 1896-1936* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001).

⁵ Robert Payton and Michael Moody, *Understanding Philanthropy: Its Meaning and Mission* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008).

The Problem

As an individual who, for generations, has been publicly and incorrectly known as “the first self-made *black* female millionaire” or “the first self-made *female* millionaire” and who gave to many charitable causes, Walker is, ironically, missing from the historiographies of American philanthropy, women’s philanthropy, and African American philanthropy.⁶ To date, none of these fields have taken serious interest in her despite her historical prominence on many levels in relation to philanthropy. Instead, the public, historians, and other interested scholars have focused on Walker as a wealthy entrepreneur, Walker as a beauty culture pioneer, or Walker as a black woman. In comparison, Walker as a philanthropist has received sparse attention by way of formal analysis and comprehensive engagement. Consequently, we have an incomplete understanding of her philanthropy, its scope, meaning, and impact, as well as the motivations for it. With few exceptions, the historiography on Walker has prioritized her entrepreneurial achievements in beauty culture, and has rarely placed philanthropy at the center of analysis. Walker’s philanthropy has been mostly addressed through tangential references or momentary detours en route to other main ideas and arguments. A review of historiographies on Walker, philanthropy in the United States, women’s and African American philanthropy makes this omission of Walker evident, and literatures on women’s philanthropic biographies, women’s business, black business, and black social welfare provide insights on how to correct it.

⁶ Walker biographer A’Lelia Bundles has shown that Walker’s wealth never actually reached \$1 million, but came close. The moniker of “millionaire”—one which Walker personally rejected—was attached to her by a *New York Times Magazine* article in 1917. Despite Walker’s objections, the label quickly adhered. The Walker Manufacturing Company used the term to describe Walker in company literature after her death. See “Wealthiest Negro Women’s Suburban Mansion,” *New York Times Magazine*, November 4, 1917, p. SM4.

Historiography on Madam C.J. Walker

In 1995, James A. Joseph—the former U.S. Ambassador to South Africa who also served as C.E.O. of the Council on Foundations and co-founder of the Association of Black Foundation Executives—dedicated a chapter specifically to Madam Walker’s “entrepreneurial philanthropy” in his *Remaking America: How the Benevolent Traditions of Many Cultures Are Transforming Our National Life*, a text published for a general audience. Focused on exploring the philanthropic giving practices of African Americans, Native Americans, Asian Americans, and Latinos, Joseph’s text frequently highlighted individual philanthropists representing the four cultural traditions. In a short nine-page chapter, Joseph used Walker to represent African American philanthropy, calling her the “premier philanthropist of her time.”⁷ Joseph highlighted Walker’s gifts of money as well as her involvement with different organizations. He credited her with connecting corporate success and corporate giving long before cause-related marketing made such a combination fashionable. Joseph deserves credit for trying to engage Walker in contemporary dialogue about philanthropy. But since his text was designed for a general audience of nonprofit practitioners, it did not situate her in a historical context.

On the heels of Joseph’s text, historian Darlene Clark Hine questioned what she called Madam Walker’s “historical obscurity” in comparison to Booker T. Washington, the venerable founder of Tuskegee Institute who overcame slavery to become the preeminent race leader of the early twentieth century. Hine explored Walker’s equally impressive rise out of southern poverty and oppression in the immediate post-slavery era to become an entrepreneur and philanthropist who helped thousands through her

⁷ James A. Joseph, *Remaking America: How the Benevolent Traditions of Many Cultures are Transforming Our National Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1995), 109.

employment and generosity. Hine asserted that Walker's "carefully orchestrated philanthropy" and "relentless adherence to a philosophy of black self-help, mutual aid, separate institutional development, and racial solidarity gave her common ground with Washington."⁸ In one essay in a 1996 volume, Hine posited that Walker's national system of employment for black women and local and regional networks of clubs were subversive forms of resistance against both white supremacy and male control of black women's bodies and lives. Consequently, Hine argued, the opening decade of the twentieth century, commonly named for Washington by historians, should more rightfully be associated with Madam Walker. Hine certainly pointed in a direction for comprehensive analysis of Walker's philanthropy, but none have answered the call.

Kathy Peiss, an important scholar in the history of beauty culture field, applied a gender analysis to consumer marketing, beauty culture, and small business to complicate traditional male-focused business history narratives.⁹ In the process, she used Madam Walker and Annie Malone, her beauty culture employer-turned-competitor, as extraordinary examples of the successful implementation of multilevel marketing in beauty culture. Her oft-cited 1998 article raised the idea of Walker's philanthropy by noting her use of agent clubs as benevolent associations and her agents' advocacy against lynching, but delved no further.

In 2001, journalist A'Lelia Bundles published *On Her Own Ground: The Life and Times of Madam C.J. Walker*.¹⁰ This was the first major biographical treatment of

⁸ Darlene Clark Hine, *Speak Truth to Power: Black Professional Class in United States History* (New York: Carlson Publishing, 1996), 97, 100.

⁹ Kathy Peiss, "'Vital Industry' and Women's Ventures: Conceptualizing Gender in Twentieth Century Business History," *Business History Review*, 72, 2 (Summer 1998): 218-241.

¹⁰ A'Lelia Bundles, *On Her Own Ground: The Life and Times of Madam C.J. Walker* (New York: Washington Square Press, 2001).

Walker, and Bundles brought both a journalistic and scholarly approach to her subject as well as kinship (Walker was her great-great grandmother). Well-researched and rife with references to primary sources, Bundles told a comprehensive story about Walker's life. Philanthropy was a theme in the work as Bundles highlighted charitable gifts and other forms of voluntary action that were of particular importance to Walker. Her work paved the way for a field like philanthropic studies to bring the theme of philanthropy to the fore and provided the needed contextualization and analysis to fully define this important element of Walker's life. The work is very useful for its comprehensive perspective on Walker, and it forms the biographical basis for this study. On the heels of Bundles' text, Beverly Lowry released *Her Dream of Dreams: The Rise and Triumph of Madam C.J. Walker* in 2003, which considered Walker's life via the various places she lived, such as St. Louis, Denver, Pittsburgh, Indianapolis, and New York.¹¹ Since these biographical efforts, the historiography on Walker has moved towards her giving and social and political activities.

Historian Robert T. Grimm, Jr. and leading Walker biographer A'Lelia Bundles deserve credit for attempting to direct the attention of philanthropic studies to Walker as a philanthropist through an encyclopedic entry in *Notable Philanthropists: Biographies of Giving and Volunteering* (2002).¹² As the entry author, Bundles summarized Walker's most well-known gifts to the Indianapolis Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) as well as her organization of agents. While the entry was only three-and-a-half pages in length

¹¹ Beverly Lowry, *Her Dream of Dreams: The Rise and Triumph of Madam C.J. Walker* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003).

¹² A'Lelia Bundles, "Madam C.J. Walker," in *Notable American Philanthropists: Biographies of Giving and Volunteering*, ed. Robert T. Grimm, Jr. (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2002), 330-333.

and repetitious of the philanthropic activities originally listed in Bundles' biography, this text had the virtue of being the first to present Walker alongside the storied titans of the history of American philanthropy for consideration as part of a diverse representation of philanthropic action.

Also in 2002, authors Ayana Byrd and Lori Tharps released *Hair Story: Untangling the Roots of Black Hair in America* in which they named some of Walker's gifts and noted general provisions of her last will and testament.¹³ Although meant for a broad public audience, their text connected Walker's giving to a philanthropic tradition beginning with black antebellum barbers. In 2003, Julia Kirk Blackwelder's *Styling Jim Crow: African American Beauty Training during Segregation* detailed the importance of beauty training schools in preparing African American women to work as hairdressers and sales agents in beauty culture during the early to mid-twentieth century.¹⁴ Blackwelder argued that these institutions were not only commercial venues, but also extensions of the institutional networks of African American communities that fought for racial uplift. In particular, she illustrated how Madam Walker utilized her own chain of such schools to prepare her multitudinous female workforce. By profiling Marjorie Stewart Joyner, who operated Walker's chain of beauty schools and trained beauty culturists and sales agents around the country, Blackwelder provided insight into a portion of the inner workings of Walker's commercial operations that related to her philanthropy.

¹³ Ayana D. Byrd and Lori L. Tharps, *Hair Story: Untangling the Roots of Black Hair in America* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2002).

¹⁴ Julia Kirk Blackwelder, *Styling Jim Crow: African American Beauty Training during Jim Crow* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2003).

In 2004, historian DeAnna Reese explained the importance of St. Louis as a locale that influenced Walker's success in business and generosity in giving. Citing some of Sarah Breedlove's early experiences in the city as a widowed, single mother as well as Madam Walker's numerous business trips there and friendships maintained over time, Reese connected some of Walker's estate gifts to St. Louis institutions like the Pine Street YMCA.¹⁵

In 2007, historian Susannah Walker's *Style & Status: Selling Beauty to African American Women, 1920-1975* discussed the Madam C.J. Walker Manufacturing Company's (MCJWMC) usage of Walker's philanthropy in its advertising both during her life time and after her death. Historian Walker asserted that company marketing materials presented Madam Walker as an exemplar of racial uplift and generosity whose personal story represented the progress the race was making in an effort to engender a sense of obligation and reciprocity to purchase products.¹⁶ Also in 2007, Afro-American Studies scholar Gloria Gibson-Hudson recounted the history of the Madam Walker Theater in Indianapolis, Indiana, the historic building constructed in 1927 by Walker's daughter A'Lelia to house the MCJWMC's operations.¹⁷ Built to include a theater, casino, beauty shop, coffee shop, drug store, and business offices, the building served as both a commercial and cultural center as well as a hub for the historic Indiana Avenue

¹⁵ DeAnna Reese, "Domestic Drudges to Dazzling Divas: The Origins of African American Beauty Culture in St. Louis, 1900-1930," in *Women in Missouri History: In Search of Power and Influence*, ed. LeeAnn Whites, Mary C. Neth, and Gary R. Kremer (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2004), 168-179.

¹⁶ Susannah Walker, *Style & Status: Selling Beauty to African American Women, 1920-1975* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2007).

¹⁷ Gloria Gibson-Hudson, "To All Classes; to All Races; This House is Dedicated: The Walker Theatre Revisited," in *Indiana's African American Heritage: Essays from Black History News & Notes*, ed. Wilma Gibbs (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 2007), 51-64; A'Lelia Bundles, *Madam Walker Theater Center: An Indianapolis Treasure* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2013). Bundles released this text as part of the *Images of America* series which tells the story of the Walker Theater through the use of archival photos.

neighborhood. In the process, Gibson-Hudson reviewed some of Walker's biography, including her efforts to end the discriminatory practices of a local movie theater that charged her a higher entry fee than whites normally paid, but did not delve further into Walker's activism or giving.

To date, two scholars have delved beyond merely cataloging Walker's gifts by moving toward analysis. In 2008, historian Kate Dossett devoted significant attention to Madam Walker, the Madam C.J. Walker Manufacturing Company (MCJWMC), and Walker's daughter A'Lelia in *Bridging Race Divides: Black Nationalism, Feminism, and Integration in the United States, 1896-1935*.¹⁸ She analyzed how the Walker women promoted a vision of respectable womanhood that merged commercial and community interests, and, in the process, gave them political access to circles of power and influence within black America. Dossett paid particular attention to the Walker benevolent clubs and their role in engaging Walker agents in their communities. She also charted Madam Walker's emerging Pan-African sensibility and worldview which had consequences for Madam Walker's philanthropy. In 2010, Tiffany Gill, historian and scholar of African American and Women's Studies, published *Beauty Shop Politics: African Americans Women's Activism in the Beauty Industry*. She engaged the topic of Madam Walker's philanthropy when she discussed the presence of Walker's training curriculum in black colleges and vocational institutes and Walker's activities with groups like the National Association of Colored Women (NACW). Citing gifts Walker made as encouragement for educational institutions to offer her training curriculum, Gill presented Walker's philanthropy as a tool for legitimizing both Walker and the profession of beauty culture.

¹⁸ Kate Dossett, *Bridging Race Divides: Black Nationalism, Feminism, and Integration in the United States, 1896-1935* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008).

Gill also connected Walker’s giving—and that of Walker’s former employer-turned-rival Annie Malone—to racial uplift by noting, “Philanthropy was at the center of the way beauty culturists voiced their strength and dignity to the black community.”¹⁹ Both of these texts provided interesting insights that moved us closer to a focused analysis of Walker’s giving, but there is more work to be done.

In 2011, Mullins *et al.* opened a new line of inquiry into Walker using historical archeology to correct what they billed as the scholarly evasion of African American wealth in favor of an emphasis on African American poverty in the early twentieth century. They conducted an archeological excavation at the site of Walker’s Indianapolis home and factory to uncover the influence of race on the social construction of wealth. Their analysis included Walker’s wealth as a tool for racial uplift through her philanthropy, but focused primarily on its symbolism of black respectability in refutation of prevailing social attitudes of wealth as “white-exclusive.”²⁰ This analysis was important to this study for its novel approach to Walker and her utility to historians in advancing understanding in many scholarly contexts.

Historian Erin Chapman made the latest contribution to Walker scholarship through *Prove It On Me: New Negroes, Sex and Popular Culture in the 1920s* (2012) in which she investigated the onus placed on black women by the early-twentieth-century trope of the New Negro. Chapman argued that Walker exemplified “New Negro women’s entrepreneurship” in a “sex-race marketplace” in which black women’s bodies

¹⁹ Tiffany M. Gill, *Beauty Shop Politics: African American Women’s Activism in the Beauty Industry* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 45.

²⁰ Paul Mullins, Modupe Labode, Lewis Jones, Michael Essex, Alex Kruse, and G. Brandon Muncy, “Consuming Lines of Difference: The Politics of Wealth and Poverty along the Color Line,” *Historical Archeology* 45, 3 (2011): 148.

and images were commodities.²¹ Of particular interest to Chapman was the MCJWMC's extensive advertising campaigns which positioned the enterprise as an institution of service to the race. She also likened Walker's national network of agents to the NACW, but she did not engage Walker's philanthropy any further.

So while the historiography on Madam C.J. Walker has acknowledged her philanthropy, it has not yet explained it. The general references to and limited analytical discussion of Walker's philanthropy have not yielded comprehensive understanding of exactly what constituted it and what it accomplished. We find similar circumstances in historiographies dedicated to American philanthropy.

Philanthropy in the United States

While the specific historiography on Walker has not placed her philanthropy at the center of analysis, neither has philanthropic studies nor the various historiographies related to American philanthropy. This oversight of Walker as philanthropist is indicative of a broader problem in the field which, for a significant time, has left women and minorities out of the construction of historical narratives. The first comprehensive history of philanthropy, originally published in 1960 and later revised in 1988, was a synthetic work celebratory in nature that focused almost exclusively on white middle- and upper-class elite men. In *American Philanthropy*, historian Robert Bremner painted a rosy picture of philanthropic activities and actors from the colonial era into the first half of the twentieth century without engaging their motives, intentions, or effects.²² His omission of women and minorities would have been absolute were it not for a few references to

²¹ Erin Chapman, *Prove It on Me: New Negroes, Sex and Popular Culture in the 1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 14.

²² Robert Bremner, *American Philanthropy*. 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

individuals such as Red Cross founder, Clara Barton, and Underground Railroad conductor, Harriet Tubman. While his oversight could be dismissed as being indicative of the social state of affairs in the academy and society during the 1950s period in which he wrote, he did not revise the second edition released in 1988 to be more representative. It still did not provide any meaningful investigation into the role of women, black women, or people of color, in general, in philanthropy. For decades, Bremner's text remained the dominant narrative on the history of American philanthropy and set the tone for the treatment of minorities and women in it.

More than forty years after Bremner, historian Lawrence Friedman and legal historian Mark McGarvie directly challenged both his celebratory tone on philanthropy and his omission of women and minorities in their 2003 edited collection, *Charity, Philanthropy and Civility in American History*.²³ Friedman, in the introduction, noted that philanthropy was diverse with "multiple and shifting meanings,"²⁴ and, based on that idea, the rest of the volume included essays by scholars that examined the philanthropic agency and activities of women, minorities, elites, and institutions as compared to the traditional emphasis on white male elites. Of their text's seventeen chapters, seven directly addressed the philanthropic contributions of women, African Americans, and other diverse populations.²⁵ Friedman highlighted several themes in the history of

²³ Lawrence Friedman and Mark McGarvie, eds., *Charity, Philanthropy and Civility in American History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

²⁴ Lawrence Friedman, "Philanthropy in America: Historicism and Its Discontents," in *Charity, Philanthropy and Civility in American History*, ed. Lawrence Friedman and Mark McGarvie (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 6.

²⁵ Stephen Warren, "Rethinking Assimilation: American Indians and the Practice of Christianity," in *Charity, Philanthropy and Civility in American History*, eds. Lawrence Friedman and Mark McGarvie (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 107-127; Roy E. Finkenbine, "Law Reconstruction, and African American Education in the Post-Emancipation South," in *Charity, Philanthropy and Civility in American History*, eds. Lawrence Friedman and Mark McGarvie (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 161-178; Kathleen D. McCarthy, "Women and Political Culture," in *Charity, Philanthropy and*

philanthropy that he believed were missing from Bremner's tome, including: 1) givers gained empowerment and developed identity through their giving; 2) women used philanthropy to redefine gender roles and develop strong public voices; and 3) ethnic groups' sense of identity was undergirded and affirmed by philanthropic acts and agency, particularly in the case of African Americans, Jews, and Catholics. In total, this volume presented an argument that compelling social visions, strong social identities, and connectedness to or disconnectedness from others motivated much of philanthropy in American history.²⁶

In 2004, Claire Gaudiani continued Friedman and McGarvie's efforts to construct more inclusive historical narratives of philanthropy in *The Greater Good: How Philanthropy Drives the American Economy and Can Save Capitalism*.²⁷ Although not a historian, Gaudiani utilized history to explore her most important themes and develop her arguments. In doing so, she was inclusive throughout her text, frequently using historical examples and arguments that presented women, African Americans, and other minorities as individuals and groups who both benefitted from and participated in philanthropic actions that transformed society. Her text opened with a recounting of the ways in which

Civility in American History, eds. Lawrence Friedman and Mark McGarvie (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 179-197; Ruth Crocker, "From Gift to Foundation: The Philanthropic Lives of Mrs. Russell Sage," in *Charity, Philanthropy and Civility in American History*, eds. Lawrence Friedman and Mark McGarvie (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 199-215; Mary J. Oates, "Faith and Good Works: Catholic Giving and Taking," in *Charity, Philanthropy and Civility in American History*, eds. Lawrence Friedman and Mark McGarvie (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 281-299; Stephen J. Whitfield, "In Defense of Diversity: Jewish Thought from Assimilation to Cultural Pluralism," in *Charity, Philanthropy and Civility in American History*, eds. Lawrence Friedman and Mark McGarvie (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 301-317; Claude E. Clegg III, "Philanthropy, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Politics of Racial Reform," in *Charity, Philanthropy and Civility in American History*, eds. Lawrence Friedman and Mark McGarvie (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 341-361.

²⁶ Lawrence Friedman, "Philanthropy in America: Historicism and Its Discontents," in *Charity, Philanthropy and Civility in American History*, ed. Lawrence Friedman and Mark McGarvie (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 10-18.

²⁷ Claire Gaudiani, *The Greater Good: How Philanthropy Drives the American Economy and Can Save Capitalism* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 2003).

African Americans in late nineteenth-century Chicago conceptualized, raised money for, and launched the Provident Hospital to provide the medical care and medical training that most white hospitals denied them. She also discussed women such as Mary Garrett, whose 1892 gift of \$354,000 to Johns Hopkins University forced its medical school to admit women, and Caroline Phelps-Stokes, whose foundation funded a range of educational programs for African Americans and Native Americans in the early twentieth century. Gaudiani dedicated one of her eleven chapters to the topic of diversity in American society and the challenges and opportunities it presents for philanthropy. Included in her treatment were discussions of the diverse cultures of giving from the Native American, Asian American, African American, Jewish, and Islamic traditions, and their potential for developing new understandings of generosity in contemporary America. Finally, in engaging critiques of philanthropy, Gaudiani lamented the role that ignorance and racism have historically played in institutional philanthropy, emphasizing the harm that has been done to communities of color directly by grant-makers or by those empowered by grant-makers to make recommendations, such as Abraham Flexner.²⁸ Although not history, Gaudiani's text certainly showed that there is sufficient evidence to craft more inclusive historical narratives than those of the past and thereby yield greater complexity, nuance, and depth to our understanding of philanthropy's character.

In 2012, historian Olivier Zunz produced *Philanthropy in America: A History*.

With a focus on the growth and increasing power of American philanthropy during the twentieth century, Zunz's narrative examined the "convergence of big-money

²⁸ In 1910, Abraham Flexner published a report on the state of medical education that was funded by the Carnegie Foundation. In the report, Flexner called for the closure of several black medical schools without conducting a complete investigation of their strengths and weaknesses or contextualizing their important role in the preparation of black doctors in the United States. One effect of this report was the limiting of access to medical education for African Americans.

philanthropy and mass giving that has sustained civil society initiatives.” Citing a contested history, Zunz investigated the innovations of elite wealthy donors and their foundations, the evolution of mass giving through widespread fundraising campaigns, the political power of philanthropy on public affairs, the scientific advances funded by both elite and mass giving, the international and geopolitical implications of philanthropic investments, and the efforts of philanthropists and their institutions to navigate contentious legal and regulatory environments related to charitable giving. Zunz concluded that investments in philanthropy by Americans of all classes “enlarged democracy.”²⁹

Although Zunz’s history focused on white male-dominated philanthropic institutions, women and African Americans did figure into the narrative. Women appeared in Zunz’s text on both sides of the philanthropic table—that is, as suffragists and elite philanthropists as well as sex workers-turned-health advocates and micro-lending recipients. Even though African Americans were frequently addressed within the context of what white philanthropic institutions were doing in black communities—including the little acknowledged story of foundations that funded important aspects of the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s—African Americans did appear as philanthropic agents who raised money for educational drives to build southern schools and launched the civil rights social revolution through their networks of churches,

²⁹ Olivier Zunz, *Philanthropy in America: A History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 3, 7; Zunz owed much of his analysis of mass giving to the work of Scott Cutlip, whose 1965 history of fundraising, which emerged from the same philanthropy research initiative led by historian Merle Curti and funded by the Sage Foundation that produced Bremner’s text, argued that twentieth century whirlwind fundraising campaigns democratized charitable giving. See Scott Cutlip, *Fundraising in the United States: Its Role in America’s Philanthropy* (1965; repr., New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1990).

schools, and community organizations. That said, Zunz’s analysis is problematic for Madam Walker, in particular, and African Americans, more broadly.

For Zunz, American philanthropy gained its power as a cultural, political, economic, and social force through the combination of the “big money” philanthropy of the elite wealthy and the small giving of the masses of Americans that occurred in the twentieth century. This perspective limits the ability to locate Walker, specifically, and African Americans, more generally, in its argument. Walker would not qualify as an elite giver by Zunz’s standards or those of others who have written about philanthropy in this period. Her gifts were not of sufficient magnitude to pass that threshold. Further, although she did make several “small gifts,” the overall arc of her giving exceeded the capacity of the millions of everyday individuals—white and black, male and female—whose small gifts in the aggregate created Zunz’s “mass giving.”³⁰ So, with “big money philanthropy” residing on one end of the spectrum of the historical narrative and mass or retail giving existing at the other, Madam C.J. Walker falls short of the threshold for the former and exceeds that of the latter. Walker’s philanthropy provides an opportunity to examine giving somewhere in the middle. We have not seen a woman like Walker in the existing historical narratives of philanthropy in America—that is, an independently wealthy woman who created rather than inherited the wealth she gave away for philanthropic purposes and who did not meet the typical criteria used to define the boundaries of such historical narratives. New analysis is necessary to help locate and understand Walker’s giving and that of those like her.

³⁰ Scott Cutlip identified this kind of giving as the “people’s philanthropy;” Claire Gaudiani labeled it “citizen generosity.” See Scott Cutlip, *Fundraising in the United States: Its Role in America’s Philanthropy* (1965; repr., New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1990), 3, 538; Claire Gaudiani, *The Greater Good: How Philanthropy Drives the American Economy and Can Save Capitalism* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 2004), 1.

Not only does Zunz's historical formulation fail to provide a context for a philanthropist like Walker, it fails to recognize African American philanthropic traditions. According to Zunz, "By the 1950s, mass philanthropy was so well integrated into everyday life in the United States that one could identify the season by the door-to-door collection programs.... A large part of the American population understood that their small gifts cumulatively enhanced the life of the nation and in turn their own."³¹ While this argument may explain widespread giving for the white populace, it does not explain African American giving. African Americans had knowledge of the power of "small gifts" long before the mid-twentieth century. African Americans had been pooling their small gifts on a large scale at least since Reconstruction, and this practice had roots in the colonial era and even earlier through West African cultures.³² Faced with a racially hostile and oppressive society that largely ignored or deliberately exacerbated the inequitable treatment and inhumane social and economic conditions of African Americans during and after slavery, black philanthropy evolved as a survival mechanism premised on the sharing of any and all available resources, no matter how small. The proliferation of black fraternal, religious, educational, and social organizations that occurred during and immediately following Reconstruction particularly illustrated this self-help tradition as such institutions were funded largely by the small gifts of black individuals. So again, we find the leading historical narratives of philanthropy in America lacking explanatory power for the philanthropic agency of African Americans and others outside the mainstream, including women.

³¹ Olivier Zunz, *Philanthropy in America: A History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 3.

³² Emmett Carson, *A Hand Up: Black Philanthropy and Self-Help in America* (Washington D.C.: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies Press, 1993); Adrienne Lash Jones, "Philanthropy in the African American Experience," in *Giving: Western Ideas of Philanthropy*, ed. J.B. Schneewind (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 153-178.

Women's Philanthropy and African American Philanthropy

Friedman and McGarvie, Gaudiani, and Zunz owed much of their ability to weave more integrated narratives than previously seen to historical works on the philanthropy of women and African Americans that developed during the intervening years between Bremner's text and their own. Historian Kathleen McCarthy—a leading figure in the study of the history of women's philanthropy—has made considerable contributions to our understanding of the presence, nature, and social effects of women's philanthropy in America. Since the early 1980s, she has identified, cultivated, and expanded an in-depth research agenda on women's philanthropy across the span of U.S. history and even overseas. In an exploratory essay published in 1988, she argued that women traditionally utilized their philanthropic gifts of time and money to forge power structures outside their domestic spheres that paralleled men's private and public spaces.³³ McCarthy posited that women's philanthropic wherewithal enabled institution-building through civic associations, social and political reform, leadership development, and career training. In 1990, she enlisted the help of a group of women's historians to further develop this research agenda in the edited volume *Lady Bountiful Revisited: Women, Philanthropy and Power*.³⁴ Nine essays investigated women's institutional development, social reform movements, political activism and reform, and career development through voluntary associations as an expansion of McCarthy's earlier exploratory essay. Central to the volume's argument was the idea that voluntary associations and philanthropic action

³³ Kathleen D. McCarthy, "Parallel Power Structures: Women and the Voluntary Sphere" (Working Paper, Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society, City University of New York, Winter 1988).

³⁴ Kathleen D. McCarthy, ed., *Lady Bountiful Revisited: Women, Philanthropy, and Power* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1990).

enabled women and minorities, as disenfranchised social groups, to assert themselves and generate social and political change.

McCarthy followed this broad survey with a detailed study of middle- and upper-class white women's use of philanthropy to create American cultural institutions in *Women's Culture: American Philanthropy and Art, 1830-1930* (1991).³⁵ Building upon her "parallel power structures" thesis and dispelling the myth that women have always been cultural custodians of the arts, McCarthy showed how women used a gendered approach to institution-building that enabled them to overcome previous exclusion from the arts and assume leading roles in some of the nation's top museums. In telling this story, McCarthy profiled prominent middle- and upper-class white women philanthropists, some of whom were contemporaries of Madam Walker, such as Olivia Sage, Isabella Stewart Gardner, Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, and Abby Aldrich Rockefeller. McCarthy expanded her argument in 1994 to examine three ways women used their associations and philanthropic power: 1) separatist strategies in which women formed their own exclusive organizations and movements for the purpose of meeting social needs and exacting political power; 2) assimilationist strategies in which women operated within male-controlled institutions as decision-makers and donors; and 3) individualist strategies in which extremely wealthy women asserted their own philanthropic agendas outside male-dominated spheres.³⁶ Again, this approach presumed a separation of public and private spheres as well as of male and female domains.

³⁵ Kathleen D. McCarthy, *Women's Culture: American Philanthropy and Art, 1830-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

³⁶ Kathleen D. McCarthy, "Women and Philanthropy: Three Strategies in a Historical Perspective" (Working Paper 22, Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society, City University of New York, Winter 1994).

However, black women did not experience the same kind of public and private sphere distinctions and restrictions that white women did in the nineteenth century.³⁷ Their social experience was qualitatively different than that of their white counterparts because slavery required them to work in the public outside their homes, and frequently caused them to have to take care of white families and white homes before they could care for their own. Any theorizing about women's philanthropy based on McCarthy's concept of parallel structures may not be able to fully consider black women's philanthropy because their lives were not structured in the same manner.

McCarthy's most recent work, *American Creed: Philanthropy and the Rise of Civil Society 1700-1865* (2003), moved in the direction of recognizing the different social experiences of women. In this book, she argued, among other things, that philanthropy and voluntary associations were critical to the social construction and reconstruction of race, class, and gender in the United States.³⁸ She highlighted the success of women, African Americans, and other minorities in using voluntary associations and philanthropy as "laboratories for democracy and communal action."³⁹ Her study, however, focused on the time period preceding that of Madam Walker's birth.

Along the lines of McCarthy's analysis, several historians have examined women's philanthropy through voluntary associations, missionary work, and exchange movements. In 1990, Lori Ginzberg's published *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* which is now

³⁷ Dorothy Schneider, *American Women in the Progressive Era, 1900-1920* (New York: Anchor Books, 1994).

³⁸ Kathleen D. McCarthy, *American Creed: Philanthropy and the Rise of Civil Society 1700-1865* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

³⁹ Kathleen D. McCarthy, *American Creed: Philanthropy and the Rise of Civil Society 1700-1865* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 5.

regarded as a classic work.⁴⁰ Using the writings of women philanthropists and association workers, Ginzberg charted the influence of gender and class on shaping political and social reform. Ginzberg further deconstructed the complexity of women's evolving identities and self-actualization through their benevolent work in associations. On the heels of this work, Anne Firor Scott released *Natural Allies: Women's Associations in American History* in 1991 which magnified the details of the evolution and characteristics of women's associations by identifying three types that existed in Antebellum and Post-Civil War America: 1) religious; 2) self-improvement; and 3) community improvement.⁴¹ In a similar vein, Karen J. Blair studied the rise and fall of women's associations in the Progressive Era, ultimately attributing their decline to their successful completion of social reforms and creation of cultural institutions to meet broader public needs, such as museums.⁴² As an example of how women's assertiveness through their organized activities created public spaces for them in a male-dominated society, Kathleen Waters Sander's 1998 work, *The Business of Charity: The Women's Exchange Movement, 1832-1900*, sheds light on the way women used exchange networks and marketplaces in major American cities to sell their own home-made crafts and items in order to generate money for charity work in their communities.⁴³ If McCarthy's analysis identified women's historic use of philanthropy to create "parallel power structures" to mitigate and overcome the constraints of their gendered position in society, then the works of Ginzberg, Scott, Blair, and others entered deeply into those structures to uncover the

⁴⁰ Lori Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990).

⁴¹ Ann Firor Scott, *Natural Allies: Women's Associations in American History* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991).

⁴² Karen J. Blair, *The Torchbearers: Women and Their Amateur Arts Associations in America, 1890-1930* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

⁴³ Kathleen Waters Sander, *The Business of Charity: The Women's Exchange Movement, 1832-1900* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998).

dynamics of women's philanthropic agenda in action. But even as this scholarship carved out the philanthropic roles and influence of women, it was inordinately focused on the endeavors of white middle- and upper-class women at the expense of other women. McCarthy, Scott, and Blair went to great lengths in their texts to explain their inattention to African American women, and encouraged other scholars to take up that topic.

Gerda Lerner and Darlene Clark Hine have led the charge in bringing African American women in from the margins of history. In her 1972 text, *Black Women in White America: A Documentary History*, Gerda Lerner utilized primary sources from black women to acknowledge and highlight their presence and agency throughout American history.⁴⁴ She paid considerable attention to black clubwomen and their voluntary associations and noted the critical importance of such organizations in the centuries-long struggle for freedom, equality, and civil rights. Perhaps the most extensive contributions in the area of black women's history have been made by Darlene Clark Hine, whose numerous volumes have brought black women out of obscurity and placed them in the center as agents and actors in U.S. history. In 1981, Hine's *When the Truth is Told: A History of Black Women's Culture and Community in Indiana, 1875-1950* illuminated the active civic lives of black Hoosier women and the numerous organizations they created and ran in order to improve their communities.⁴⁵ Many of the Indianapolis-based organizations she covered, such as the Alpha Home and the local NAACP, figured largely into Madam Walker's philanthropy.

⁴⁴ Gerda Lerner, *Black Women in White America: A Documentary History* (New York: Random House, 1972).

⁴⁵ Darlene Clark Hine, *When the Truth is Told: A History of Black Women's Culture and Community in Indiana, 1875-1950* (Indianapolis: National Council of Negro Women, 1981).

In 1984, Paula Giddings explored the position of black women in a racist and patriarchal society in *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America*.⁴⁶ Noting the numerous ways black women asserted themselves through print media, associations, and other forms of advocacy, Giddings told a history of black women navigating the American fissures of race and gender in their clashes with racist white men and women and sexist black men. Darlene Clark Hine and Kathleen Thompson's 1998 work *A Shining Thread of Hope: The History of Black Women in America* devoted considerable space to discussion and analysis of black women's civic roles and organizations.⁴⁷ Hine and Thompson asserted that these organizations focused on social and political reform, and represented themes of community development, education, and human dignity that connected black women's experience across time and their activism across institutions.

Black women's work was not limited to clubs and associations. The Black Church provided an important outlet for black women's agency and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham detailed the women's movement within the black Baptist church during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*.⁴⁸ She asserted that black women made the Black Church the effective social agency and political vehicle that it became for preserving cultural identity, meeting community needs, and contesting lynching and oppression. Concerned that studies by Higginbotham and others on black women in specific

⁴⁶ Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (New York: Bantam Books, 1984).

⁴⁷ Darlene Clark Hine and Kathleen Thompson, *A Shining Thread of Hope: The History of Black Women in America* (New York: Broadway Books, 1998).

⁴⁸ Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

denominations would be taken to account for black women's experience in all denominations, historian Bettye Collier-Thomas produced *Jesus, Jobs, and Justice: African American Women and Religion* in 2010 to consider denominational differences among black women and their interracial cooperation with white women. Collier-Thomas argued that analysis of religious and spiritual life is just as critical for understanding black women as analyses of race, class, and gender. In her study, Collier-Thomas detailed how religious black women created complex organizational networks through their many denominations that served as vital infrastructure in the struggles for freedom from racism, sexism, and poverty. In the process, she revealed "what it meant to be a club woman and a church woman, and how black women constructed their identities in a manner designed to merge their religious and secular experiences and environments."⁴⁹ The field of philanthropic studies has not fully considered the implications of this literature as part of its interdisciplinary analysis of philanthropy.

By examining Madam Walker's philanthropy and the community causes and institutions she supported, the present study continues the effort to bring black women in from the margins and engage them on their own terms. The historiography on black women provides firm grounding for assessing the meaning and effects of Madam Walker's giving and examining the role of race, class, and gender on her philanthropic giving. By studying the philanthropic motivations, activities, and agenda of a wealthy African American woman, this research will also open up a neglected line of inquiry within the historiography on African American philanthropy, which has tended to focus on the community or institutional level rather than individuals.

⁴⁹ Bettye Collier-Thomas *Jesus, Jobs and Justice: African American Women and Religion* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2010), xix.

The emphasis on black communal or institutional giving is evident in key historical works on African American philanthropy. Emmett Carson's monograph entitled *A Hand Up: Black Philanthropy and Self-Help in America* (1993) has become a classic that established a research agenda for exploring African American giving and volunteering.⁵⁰ Carson charted the early roots of African American philanthropy from the African burial societies and associations of the colonial era to the black federated fundraising campaigns of the 1970s and 1980s. While Carson discussed the self-help nature of black philanthropy and its operation within family- and community-based networks to address major social, political, and economic needs, he focused on the Black Church, mutual aid societies, educational institutions, and fraternities and sororities as organizations with specific roles in the black community.

Laura Tuennerman-Kaplan provided a community-level study of philanthropy in urban ethnic communities in *Helping Others Helping Ourselves: Power, Giving, and Community Identity in Cleveland, Ohio, 1880-1930* (2001).⁵¹ In an exploration of the social and cultural functions of philanthropy, she argued that Italians and African Americans in Progressive Era Cleveland utilized their kinship-based networks of philanthropy to assert political agendas and power in their own communities. Rather than viewing black institutions—such as the Black Church, benevolent societies, fraternities and sororities, homes for the aged—as separate and distinct from each other, she showed how they worked together to form a philanthropic web of social support through community giving that enabled the meeting of immediate needs and the assertion of

⁵⁰ Emmett Carson, *A Hand Up: Black Philanthropy and Self-Help in America* (Washington D.C.: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies Press, 1993).

⁵¹ Laura Tuennerman-Kaplan, *Helping Others Helping Ourselves: Power, Giving, and Community Identity in Cleveland, Ohio, 1880-1930* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2001).

power to protect and shape the local community. This institutional focus continued in the work of Theda Skocpol, Ariane Liazos, and Marshall Ganz who published a comprehensive history of African American fraternal groups in direct response to the lack of interest of previous scholars who have investigated Americans' participation in voluntary associations throughout the Progressive Era.⁵² Noting that this story was a missing chapter in the history of U.S. democracy and civic culture, they argued that African Americans did not merely create imitative associations to mirror those in the larger white community, but they created distinctive social and political institutions that pursued philanthropic, economic, and social justice imperatives in their communities. They also noted the critical role that black women played in these institutions, whether they were in auxiliary spin-offs from the male orders or independent women's organizations. This work represented a critical departure from the larger literature on fraternalism, which has tended to overlook the importance of African American fraternal and mutual aid organizations.⁵³

While these African American philanthropic institutions are important and definitely understudied, we know even less about individual African American philanthropists and how they may have operated inside and outside of these institutions and networks. Carson did not profile individual black philanthropists in depth and neither did the aforementioned studies on black institutions. A deliberate historical investigation

⁵² Theda Skocpol, Ariane Liazos, and Marshall Ganz, *What A Mighty Power We Can Be: African American Fraternal Groups and the Struggle for Racial Equality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

⁵³ Mark Carnes, *Secret Ritual and Manhood in Victorian America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989). Carnes did not include black fraternalism in his study of fraternal rituals. Jason Kaufman, *For the Common Good? American Civic Life and the Golden Age of Fraternity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). Kaufman did not think African American fraternalism to be significant due to low membership numbers and activities. David Beito, *From Mutual Aid to the Welfare State: Fraternal Societies and Social Services, 1890-1967* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000). Beito was an exception due to his emphasis and considerable treatment of the International Order of Twelve Knights and Daughters of Tabor, an African American fraternal group that built hospitals across the South in the 1940s.

of individual African Americans as philanthropic agents has begun to develop through the work of higher education historians Marybeth Gasman and Katherine Sedgwick. They proffered a call to examine the historical link between philanthropy and education that has existed in African American communities since the colonial era. Seeking to further dispel the myth that African Americans have historically been only recipients of philanthropy and not agents of it, their volume, *Uplifting a People: African American Philanthropy and Education*, placed several individual black men and black women at the center of analysis as philanthropic actors including Thurgood Marshall, Booker T. Washington, Howard Thurman, Osceola McCarty, and leaders of The Links women's social service organization.⁵⁴ Gasman and Sedgwick made an important contribution to the historiography, but there is a need for more full length and in-depth historical investigations of individual African American philanthropists.

Researchers Cheryl Hall-Russell and Robert Kasberg developed a contemporary framework for African American philanthropy based on historical roots by interviewing individual African American donors from the Midwest. Hall-Russell and Kasberg discussed the importance of mutual aid, the black family, the Black Church, and informal and nonmonetary forms of giving and sharing in African American philanthropy. In the process, they identified ten traits of African American philanthropy which they argued distinguished it from white philanthropy. Of these ten, four are particularly relevant to this study and help to contextualize the giving of Madam C.J. Walker. According to this research, African American philanthropy is historically distinguished by: 1) a broadened and inclusive view of family and kinship from which giving begins and emanates

⁵⁴ Marybeth Gasman and Katherine Sedgwick, eds., *Uplifting a People: African American Philanthropy and Education* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005).

outward; 2) a view of helping others as a general obligation rather than a formal type of “philanthropy”; 3) a collective orientation which holds that helping individuals helps the whole race; and 4) a belief that all are worthy of help because of the unfair conditions imposed by society.⁵⁵ These traits are the building blocks of what has generally been labeled self-help and racial uplift in regards to African American philanthropy. But not all scholars have taken a kind view toward self-help.⁵⁶

Historian Adrienne Lash Jones argued that the self-help label was part of a problematic conceptualization that prevented African American philanthropic action from being recognized and understood. She observed that typical definitions of philanthropy in scholarly research arbitrarily separated voluntary action into two categories, namely “charity or voluntarism” and “philanthropy.” Charity and voluntarism were typically applied to women and organizations serving the needy, and comprised gifts of time, talent, and money. Philanthropy, on the other hand, was typically identified with the wealthy class and its significantly larger monetary gifts. In 1996, Jones critically asserted that, as terms and concepts, charity, voluntarism, and philanthropy did not take into consideration either the motives of the donors or the racial and ethnic identity of the donors. Consequently, Jones found the categorization of African American philanthropic

⁵⁵ Cheryl Hall-Russell and Robert Kasberg, *African American Traditions of Giving and Serving: A Midwest Perspective* (Indianapolis: The Center on Philanthropy at Indiana University, 1997), 4.

⁵⁶ Historian Kevin Gaines critiqued what he called “the self-help ideology of racial uplift.” According to Gaines, the meaning of this ideology was contested and had at least two connotations. The first referred to the collective struggle African Americans engaged to overcome racial oppression through actions of protest and agency. This definition was pervasive after Emancipation. He ascribed the second, and more complex, connotation to black elites for whom the ideology meant “an emphasis on self-help, racial solidarity, temperance, thrift, chastity, social purity, patriarchal authority, and the accumulation of wealth.” Gaines argued that black elites operationalized this self-help ideology of racial uplift “by distinguishing themselves, as bourgeois agents of civilization, from the presumably undeveloped black majority.” As a result, Gaines asserted that racial uplift was grounded in inequality and functioned as “a form of cultural politics” and accommodation that exploited the black masses. See Kevin Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), xiv, 2, 3.

action as “self-help” denigrating and dismissive of the African American philanthropic impulse and experience because it focused on the motives and racial identity of donors, which was not the standard practice when examining the activities of white donors. Jones argued that this label presumed a provincial focus with no benefit to the larger society and effectively rendered African American philanthropy “inconsequential.” Jones solved this conundrum by defining philanthropy as “*any act which expresses loving mankind; goodwill to fellow men [humanity]...especially manifested in donations of money, property, or work to needy persons or to socially useful purposes.*” Further, she qualified this definition by identifying benevolence as the overriding motivation without regard for the constitution of gifts or the intended beneficiaries. Taken together, her revised definition undergirded by benevolence as motivation—she argued—would enable better descriptions of the philanthropic agency and activities of larger portions of society than approaches based on self-help.⁵⁷

For the purposes of this study, Jones’ critique is informative. This study agrees with Jones that self-help describes a motive and that the term has been misconstrued as having a provincial focus; however, unlike Jones, this study asserts that motives are important because philanthropy is based on deeply-held values. These values form the intent and meaning of the gifts made and actions taken to benefit others. As a motive, self-help makes visible a fuller expression of philanthropic action that might otherwise continue unnoticed because it may not conform to the charity-voluntarism-philanthropy construct Jones critiqued. As an investigation into the nature of and motives for Madam Walker’s giving, the definitional conundrum Jones highlighted has been solved by this

⁵⁷ Adrienne Lash Jones, “Philanthropy in the African American Experience” in *Giving: Western Ideas of Philanthropy*, ed., J.B. Schneewind (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 153, 154, 155. Emphasis in original.

study's orientation toward a broad and expansive view of philanthropy that applies to more than black people. Self-help proved useful for identifying the motivations that animated and undergirded Walker's giving, and led to numerous manifestations of potentially philanthropic actions that Walker engaged. Consequently, rather than being obscured, Walker's philanthropy emerges in its fullness.

Women's Philanthropic Biographies

When it comes to the study of individual philanthropists, biographies of the leading white male philanthropists in U.S. history abound. Less scholarly attention has been paid to the biographies of women philanthropists. In 1993, Bernice Kert began to close this gap with *Abby Aldrich Rockefeller: The Woman in the Family*, which chronicled the life, times, and philanthropy of John D. Rockefeller, Jr.'s wife.⁵⁸ The activities of the Rockefeller men have commanded much attention, but Kert presented a clear and compelling argument for attending to Abby Rockefeller's role in the founding and management of the Museum of Modern Art along with her distribution of Rockefeller funds and influence on her husband.

Ruth Crocker's 2006 work entitled *Mrs. Russell Sage: Women's Activism and Philanthropy in Gilded Age and Progressive Era America* provided fresh historical insight into the life of a woman whose philanthropic dollars came from her deceased husband, but whose philanthropic agenda was all her own.⁵⁹ Crocker showed how Sage's philanthropy, though it lasted only twelve years, found its roots much earlier in her life and evolved over time. Based on deep religious sensibilities and an elite social position,

⁵⁸ Bernice Kert, *Abby Aldrich Rockefeller: The Woman in the Family* (New York: Random House, 1993).

⁵⁹ Ruth Crocker, *Mrs. Russell Sage: Women's Activism and Philanthropy in Gilded Age and Progressive Era America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006).

Sage's philanthropy was based on a certain notion of community and responsibility. Sage provided insights into her philanthropic agency in her own 1905 essay, entitled "Opportunities and Responsibilities of Leisured Women," in which she declared the moral obligation of women of influence and affluence to advance women's causes and promote social reform and civic development.⁶⁰

In 2012, historian Sylvia Hoffert's *Alva Vanderbilt Belmont: Unlikely Champion of Women's Rights* detailed the ways in which the New York socialite utilized philanthropy and activism to seek attention and engage in a kind of "self-making" to enhance her own prominence and advance the cause of women's rights.⁶¹ Belmont first married into the wealthy family of railroad magnate Cornelius Vanderbilt and then later, following divorce, married into the family of August Belmont, a Jewish banker from Germany. In a manner similar to Olivia Sage, Belmont was a late bloomer in terms of her philanthropy and activism, which came during the last three of her eight decades. But once she engaged, she was fully committed. Belmont felt a great burden to ensure more than sufficient financial resources for the National Women's Party. Hoffert credited Belmont's generosity as almost single-handedly funding the militant activism that led to passage of the 19th Amendment guaranteeing suffrage for women. Belmont was an important figure, and this biography continued efforts to center historical narratives on American philanthropy around late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century white women who married into and inherited the wealth that they later distributed philanthropically. As has been shown by these works, examining diverse historical subjects can challenge

⁶⁰ Margaret Olivia Sage, "Opportunities and Responsibilities of Leisured Women," *North American Review* 181, 588 (November 1905): 712-721.

⁶¹ Sylvia D. Hoffert, *Alva Vanderbilt Belmont: Unlikely Champion of Women's Rights* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), ix.

deeply held notions about what philanthropy is, who engages in it, and for what purposes; this furthers the argument in support of investigating a woman like Madam C.J. Walker.

Women's and Black Business History

In addition to the historiographies related to philanthropy, women's philanthropy, and African American philanthropy, there is a relevant body of literature in fields related to the history of business that focuses on women's and African Americans' experiences in American enterprise. This literature is particularly instructive for an investigation of Walker, who did not inherit the wealth she gave away, like the majority of women heralded as philanthropists during this time period, but rather created it as a "self-made" entrepreneur in beauty culture.

In 1994, historian Angel Kwolek-Folland's *Engendering Business: Men and Women in the Corporate Office, 1870-1930* provided a useful analysis of the dynamics of race, class, and culture in the American financial corporation.⁶² In particular, she analyzed how gender, class, and race interacted differently in the workplace for black women and white women, with the former holding positions in black-owned financial businesses that were off limits to the latter in white-owned companies. Although there were constraints, according to Kwolek-Folland, the agency, acumen, and intelligence of black women were more recognized and accepted in the black business community than those of white women in mainstream companies. Kwolek-Folland followed this work with *Incorporating Women: A History of Women and Business in the United States* in

⁶² Angel Kwolek-Folland, *Engendering Business: Men and Women in the Corporate Office, 1870-1930* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994).

2002.⁶³ In merging women's history and business history, Kwolek-Folland not only showed the presence and active involvement of women in American business since the colonial era, but also challenged concepts of entrepreneurship and the very nature of commercial enterprise. She argued for a nuanced understanding of women as consumers, workers, managers, entrepreneurs, executives, wives, and mothers, and noted how gender both constrained and liberated women's economic activity. She paid extensive attention to the role of race and class in women's business experiences, and spent considerable space addressing the business endeavors of black women, including Madam Walker.

In 2005, women's studies and education scholar Cheryl Smith argued that black American women possessed a strong tradition of entrepreneurial participation that dated back to pre-colonial West Africa in *Market Women: Black Women Entrepreneurs Past, Present and Future*. In recognition of the distinctive historical experience and status of black women apart from white women, Smith asserted that "Gender is not always unifying."⁶⁴ According to Smith, extant theories about business and entrepreneurs did not accurately consider the circumstances of black women, whose efforts in business were regularly thwarted by a hostile government and by white violence—phenomena white businesses did not face. Such a volatile environment often required clandestine entrepreneurship on the part of black women as well as continual adjustment and creativity. Consequently, Smith argued that the entrepreneurial spirit and activities of black women could be found in literature, journalism, education, service industries, religion, the arts, and the professions. Smith presented Madam Walker as an example of a

⁶³ Angel Kwolek-Folland, *Incorporating Women: A History of Women and Business in the United States* (New York: Palgrave, 2002).

⁶⁴ Cheryl Smith, *Market Women: Black Women Entrepreneurs Past, Present and Future* (Westport: Praeger, 2005), 9.

woman who used “business as activism and activism as business.”⁶⁵ This intersection is important for understanding how Walker engaged in philanthropy.

In 2009, Juliet E.K. Walker, the leading scholar of the history of black business, published *The History of Black Business in America: Capitalism, Race, Entrepreneurship, Volume I, to 1865*. Historian Walker evinced that the history of business scholarship dismissed black business as a subject because of the myth of the lack of a black business tradition, and attributed black business failures to this absence.⁶⁶ She challenged this myth by excavating a black business tradition of entrepreneurial activities that was rooted in West Africa and readily present in America since the colonial period. She determined that not only have black entrepreneurs been in existence since that time period, but black “intrapreneurs”—black slaves entrusted to autonomously run the daily operations of other business enterprises owned by their masters both on and away from their plantations—existed during the period of slavery, an era not associated with black business activity. She argued that the reconstruction of the history of black business would enable the creation of new theories to explain this phenomenon. She did not include Madam Walker in this volume because it covered history until 1865, two years before Walker’s birth. But her arguments suggest that the history of black business and entrepreneurship may serve as a portal to the history of black philanthropy and black philanthropists because of black business’s rootedness in the self-help tradition, its widespread utility to serve multiple purposes in the long-suffering struggle for freedom and equality, and its role in wealth creation.

⁶⁵ Cheryl Smith, *Market Women: Black Women Entrepreneurs Past, Present and Future* (Westport: Praeger, 2005), 50.

⁶⁶ Juliet E.K. Walker, *The History of Black Business in America: Capitalism, Race, Entrepreneurship*, 2nd ed., Volume 1 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

Black Social Welfare

Just as the historiography on black business suggests opportunities for inquiry into black philanthropy, the historiography on black social welfare offers a model for engaging both individuals and institutions in narratives about black benevolence. As a field, the history of black social welfare traces its intellectual lineage back to the early work of W.E.B. Du Bois, including his 1909 study, *Efforts for Social Betterment among Negro Americans*. In this text, he applied scientific methods to describe and analyze benevolent efforts conducted by blacks for their own communities. Based on a survey of key geographic centers of the black populace, Du Bois meticulously recorded an array of churches, schools, women's clubs, old folks' homes, orphanages, hospitals, colored YMCAs and YWCAs, literary clubs, libraries, day nurseries, and social settlements, as well as individual black philanthropists. It was in this study that Du Bois acknowledged the philanthropic proclivities of African Americans: "Few races are more instinctively philanthropic than the Negro. It is shown in everyday life and in their group history. Some few of their larger philanthropies in America in early days have been recorded."⁶⁷ From his perch as an observer, Du Bois saw abundant evidence of philanthropy in the everyday lives and activities of African Americans.

Today, the history of black social welfare field includes seminal works from the 1970s and 1980s as well as a substantial literature that has evolved since the 1990s. The earlier works took cues from leading historical, sociological, and anthropological scholars on black families and black communities from slavery to the twentieth century, such as Herbert Gutman, Eugene Genovese, Andrew Billingsley, Melville Herskovits, Gunnar

⁶⁷ W.E.B. Du Bois, *Efforts for Social Betterment Among Negro Americans* (Atlanta: Atlanta University Press, 1909): 37.

Myrdal, E. Franklin Frazier, and St. Clair Drake. Scholars of black social welfare built upon this scholarship to develop a two-fold research agenda focused on documenting: 1) the ways in which black families and communities met their own social service needs in response to the hostile conditions of slavery, the broader white society, and later, an indifferent, discriminatory and neglectful public social welfare system; and 2) the professionalization of social welfare and the rise of black social workers. In the process, they engaged personal biography and institutional history to document a tradition of resilience, determination, and agency on the part of black individuals, families, institutions, and communities in meeting the social needs of the race as a whole.

In 1978, Edyth Ross released *Black Heritage in Social Welfare, 1860-1930*, a documentary history that examined the agency of blacks and their deliberate use of self-help and social uplift strategies to endure oppressive conditions in the U.S. This study was designed to familiarize readers with “the persons who have pioneered the development of social welfare programs for blacks” and the “complementary structure of institutions” erected by blacks to meet their own needs.⁶⁸ Through documentary evidence representing four historical periods of the black experience which spanned Madam Walker’s life, Ross examined the social welfare role of all-black towns, the Black Church, multiple function service agencies, single function service agencies, labor organizations as well as social movements, the Great Migration, lynchings, race riots, and other social issues within the context of changing legal and public policy environments. Through these topical areas, she identified numerous individual actors who raised funds, provided leadership, started organizations, advocated for social change, and engaged in a range of additional activities. She concluded that “The black heritage is a complex of

⁶⁸ Edyth Ross, *Black Heritage in Social Welfare, 1860-1930* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1978), 2, 3.

genuine responses by black people reacting to the need for social welfare services in their own communities” that manifested itself through “competent individuals supported by well-organized groups.”⁶⁹ Rather than focusing on either black individuals or black institutions, Ross illustrated the interconnections between the two in the quest for social services and social change.

In 1985, Joanne Martin and Elmer Martin published *The Helping Tradition in the Black Family and Community* in which they asserted “that nineteenth-century blacks, in particular, had a powerful sense of mutual aid and communal solidarity that grew out of a strong black family tradition” and was rooted in the pre-slavery African collective philosophy of “I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am.”⁷⁰ They theorized that the proliferation of self-help activities by blacks during Madam Walker’s lifetime emerged from a tradition of mutual aid, social-class cooperation, and prosocial behavior in children that began in the black extended family and expanded outward into black institutions and black communities through fictive kin relationships and ever-growing racial and religious consciousness among blacks. For instance, Martin and Martin linked the black community’s social obligation to care for the elderly and children to the tradition of mutual aid and fictive kinship structures. Elderly slaves, they proffered, were too frail to work as they once had and were frequently sold away or treated poorly by slave masters. Similarly, slave masters’ tolerance for slave children, who were too young to work or too rebellious to control, was low. Consequently, able-bodied slaves looked after their elders and minded the young, regardless of blood relations, ensuring the

⁶⁹ Edyth Ross, *Black Heritage in Social Welfare, 1860-1930* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1978), 465, 466.

⁷⁰ Joanne Martin and Elmer Martin, *The Helping Tradition in the Black Family and Community* (Silver Spring, MD: National Association of Social Workers, 1985), 2, 12.

physical needs of the former were met while keeping the latter out of trouble's way. Once slavery ended, this practice of caring for the very young and the very old evolved into orphanages and old folks' homes.⁷¹ Martin and Martin traced this helping tradition from West African origins into slavery through Reconstruction and forward to the professionalization of black social workers in the early twentieth century. Their work set the foundation for the current leading scholar of black social welfare history.

Social work historian Iris Carlton-LaNey has produced a significant body of scholarship since the late 1980s, which particularly demonstrated this field's agility in examining individuals and institutions concurrently as part of the black experience in America. In 1989, Carlton-LaNey identified the establishment and maintenance of old folks' homes by black individuals, churches, women's clubs, and secret orders and fraternities as the "major charitable activity" of blacks during the Progressive Era.⁷² In the mid-1990s, Carlton-LaNey chronicled the life stories of George Haynes and Birdye Henrietta Haynes, siblings who were the respective first black graduates of the New York School of Philanthropy and the Chicago School of Civics and Philanthropy, pioneering institutions in the professionalization of social work. George Haynes became the founding executive director of the National Urban League; Birdye Henrietta Haynes led black settlement houses in New York and Chicago; and together, Carlton-LaNey credited them with creating models of social work practice in black communities.⁷³

⁷¹ Joanne Martin and Elmer Martin, *The Helping Tradition in the Black Family and Community* (Silver Spring, MD: National Association of Social Workers, 1985), 23, 24.

⁷² Iris Carlton-LaNey "Old Folks' Homes for Blacks during the Progressive Era," *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare* 16, 3 (September 1989): 43-60.

⁷³ Iris Carlton-LaNey, "The Career of Birdye Henrietta Haynes, a Pioneer Settlement House Worker," *Social Service Review* 68, 2 (June 1994): 254-273; Iris Carlton-LaNey, "George and Birdye Haynes' Legacy to Community Practice," *Journal of Community Practice* 2, 4 (1996): 27-48.

Carlton-LaNey later examined the historical development of the foundational principles of black social work practice—such as self-help, race pride, mutual aid, and social debt—that pioneers like the Haynes siblings exemplified. In the process, she named the multiple organizational memberships and civic engagements of black social work pioneers as an intricate “web of affiliation” reflective of core commitments to uplift and collaboration, and necessary to address the myriad problems facing the race.⁷⁴ In a manner reflective of Martin and Martin’s argument about the origins of the black helping tradition, Carlton-LaNey and her colleagues examined the evolution of the informal practices of “sitting with the sick” into formal healthcare provision among blacks, and the role of black women’s clubs, sororities, schools, and settlement houses in mothering and nurturing black girls.⁷⁵

Additional scholars in this area have highlighted Harriet Tubman’s creation of an old folks’ home as a result of rescuing her parents from slavery, the historical roots of the ethnic social service agency, and Progressive Era models of black community development.⁷⁶ In total, this historiography provides relevant insights about the nature of black self-help activities during Madam Walker’s lifetime, and the ways in which both black individuals and black institutions contributed to their development.

⁷⁴ Iris Carlton-LaNey, “African American Social Work Pioneers’ Response to Need,” *Social Work* 44, 4 (July 1999): 311-321. For biographies of four women who built organizations see Iris Carlton-LaNey and Sandra Carlton Alexander, “Early African American Social Welfare Pioneer Women: Working to Empower the Race and the Community,” *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Diversity in Social Work* 10, 2 (2001): 67-84

⁷⁵ Iris Carlton-LaNey, Jill Hamilton, Dorothy Ruiz, and Sandra Carlton Alexander, ““Sitting with the Sick’: African American Women’s Philanthropy,” *Affilia* 16 (Winter 2001): 447-466; Iris Carlton-LaNey and Vanessa Hodges, “African American Women Reformers’ Mission: Caring for Our Girls and Women,” *Affilia* 19, 3 (Fall 2004): 257-272.

⁷⁶ Sandra Edmonds Crewe, “Harriet Tubman’s Last Work,” *Journal of Gerontological Social Work* 49, 3 (2007): 229-244; Alfreda Iglehart and Rosina Becerra, “Social Work and the Ethnic Agency: A History of Neglect,” *Journal of Multicultural Social Work* 4, 1 (1996): 1-20; Sandra O’Donnell, “Urban African American Community Development in the Progressive Era,” *Journal of Community Practice* 2, 4 (1996): 7-26.

Developing an Approach to Understanding Madam Walker's Philanthropy

And so, the question remains, what do we make of these historiographies and the difficulty in finding Madam C.J. Walker within them? Educational historian Andrea Walton's formulation of "the problem of conceptions" with respect to defining philanthropy provides some answers.⁷⁷ Walton deployed this framework to challenge male-dominated historical narratives which emphasized accumulation and distribution of extraordinary wealth as markers of philanthropy, and thereby rendered women's giving, which has both monetary and nonmonetary expressions, invisible. She argued that a broader definition of philanthropy encompassing tangible and intangible gifts of time and money suddenly brought to the fore women's philanthropic agency which had been present throughout this history from the beginning. Over time, the history of philanthropy field has recognized this "problem of conceptions" and, in recent years, has been taking steps to address it through broader definitions and more inclusive narratives. Still embryonic with much work to do, the field, however, lacks a framework for understanding someone like Walker, who does not fit neatly into its conceptual continuum anchored by elite giving on one end and mass giving on the other.

In an interesting twist of the problem of conceptions, the historical field of women's philanthropy is predicated on the experiences of elite and middle-class white women, who have certainly been invisible until recently, but who hardly represent all women as the field's label implies. Historically, gender has not trumped race for black women. By virtue of being black in a white male-dominated society and female in male-dominated black society, black women were subjected to the oppression, indifference,

⁷⁷ Andrea Walton, ed., *Woman and Philanthropy in Education* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 1.

and hostility of not only white men and black men, but also white women. The frequently cited public versus private sphere delineation that created quandaries for white women in the nineteenth century and formed the basis for their feminist understanding of where their struggle needed to take them is conceptually inadequate for assessing black women's experience and activities. Black women's public spheres were not delineated only by gender, but also by race.⁷⁸ Black women frequently completed the same work as black men because of the structures of slavery. Similarly, after slavery ended, it was mostly their race and not their gender that defined work options and opportunities for black women. Further, there were occasions when white women felt threatened by the presence of black women in the labor force and gender-based conflict ensued. But even then, such conflicts were typically resolved in favor of white women by virtue of their skin color and not their gender.⁷⁹ These differences underscore the inadequacy of current theories of women's philanthropy for explaining the voluntary and philanthropic actions of black women. While their invisibility has been recognized and attention brought to this issue, we have not yet had a very effective formulation of black women's philanthropy in philanthropic studies that accounts for their unique social position.⁸⁰ This dissertation seeks to characterize some of the dynamics of black women's philanthropy from within as modeled and exemplified by the life of Madam C.J. Walker.

⁷⁸ Dorothy Schneider, *American Women in the Progressive Era, 1900-1920* (New York: Anchor Books, 1994); Eleanor Smith, "Black American Women and Work: A Historical Review 1619-1920," *Women Studies International Forum* 8, 4, (1985): 343-349; Bettye Collier-Thomas, *Jesus, Jobs, and Justice: African American Women and Religion* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010); Cheryl Smith, *Market Women: Black Women Entrepreneurs Past, Present and Future* (Westport: Preager, 2005).

⁷⁹ Eleanor Smith, "Black American Women and Work: A Historical Review 1619-1920," *Women Studies International Forum* 8, 4 (1985): 343-349.

⁸⁰ Anne Firor Scott, "Most Invisible of All: Black Women's Voluntary Associations," *Journal of Southern History* 56, 1 (February 1990): 3-22.

African American philanthropy, as a historical field, has tended to focus on African Americans' traditions of giving and sharing as communal survival mechanisms in a hostile and deadly society in tandem with their agency in taking voluntary action and building philanthropic institutions to bring about social change. As of yet, emphasis on individual African American philanthropists has not been a priority for this field, which has tended to raise institutions and movements above individuals. This general approach is consistent with the core principle of collective uplift in black philanthropy which emphasizes group over individual and defines success in terms of the status of the whole race rather than portions of it; however, it is time to examine individual black philanthropists more closely for the insights and perspectives their lives offer on the human phenomenon of philanthropy.

The field of African American philanthropy may not have found its way to individuals like Madam Walker yet because of the premise that blacks have been deliberately denied the kinds of economic wealth-building opportunities that have historically lent themselves to giving “significant” (read as quantitatively large) amounts of money in ways typically associated with wealthy white men. African American philanthropy has focused on small gifts of time and even smaller gifts of money—which in the aggregate met social needs and funded institutions—in order to engage blacks in the historiography as relevant philanthropic agents. But it is conceivable that this field's adherence to this conceptualization has made it unable or perhaps hesitant to recognize cases in which material giving exceeded the limitations of this premise. Walker demonstrates that in addition to gifts of time and talent, African American philanthropists also historically understood the importance of gifts of money and the value of giving at

the highest financial levels possible to advance the race. While such monetary giving may not have quantitatively resembled the likes of famed white philanthropists like Andrew Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller, it does not need to in order to be socially meaningful and historically significant. The goal is not to find “black” Carnegies and “black” Rockefellers, but rather to understand black giving on its own terms.

This study accomplishes that goal by interweaving literature from historical fields related to black women, black business, black social welfare, women’s business, women’s philanthropy, African American philanthropy, and American philanthropy, and bringing them into conversation with each other, with the field of philanthropic studies, and with primary sources surrounding the subject of Madam C.J. Walker’s philanthropy. The resulting dialogues yield understanding of and conclusions about Walker’s generosity.

The Study

This study is a historical analysis of Madam C.J. Walker’s philanthropic actions to improve the quality of life for African Americans in the early twentieth century. In this dissertation, I argue that Madam Walker’s philanthropy dynamically unfolded over time out of a moral imagination forged by her race, class, and gender, specifically: 1) her experiences as a recipient of black benevolence in the 1880s and 1890s as Sarah Breedlove, a southern black female migrant worker living in St. Louis, Missouri, and raising her daughter as a widowed single mother in an increasingly segregated world; 2) her rootedness in the social gospel of the African Methodist Episcopal Church; 3) her proximity to black suffering, which gave her a broader sense of the conditions and needs

of blacks across the United States and overseas; and 4) her accelerated accumulation of material resources, which grew exponentially from 1905 to her death in 1919. Walker's philanthropy is rightly viewed within the context of the national proliferation of black self-help initiatives and institution-building—frequently led by black women—that responded to the inaction, indifference, and surging hostility of late nineteenth and early twentieth century white-controlled governments, markets, and voluntary associations toward the social, political, and economic conditions of black communities. Her status and experience as a black woman caused her to generously deploy a diverse array of philanthropic resources to meet the needs of the race.

The rationale for conducting this study emerges from the fact that as a historical figure primarily known for being a wealthy, black, female beauty culture entrepreneur and philanthropist in the early twentieth century, Madam Walker's philanthropy has never been at the center of scholarly analysis. This is a major oversight because she was one of the most famous and wealthy black women of her time. Her philanthropy has not been completely neglected as has been shown, but the scholarship on her has not advanced much past simply considering her most publicized gifts and activities. What is needed is a scholarly analysis of the totality of her giving, the motivations for it, and the contexts in which it unfolded.

The primary questions that shaped this study were: 1) What constituted Walker's giving? 2) Why did she give? 3) To whom and for what purposes did she give? Or put another way, what did Walker give, for which reasons or purposes, and to what ends?

Significance of Study

The significance of this study is found in the nature of its subject. In terms of the specific historiography on Walker, this study is the first to prioritize her philanthropic actions and attempt an engagement of them as opposed to other studies with different foci and only piecemeal references or inconsistent and episodic attempts to delve into the nature of her giving. Walker is missing from the historiographies of American philanthropy, women's philanthropy, and African American philanthropy even though she has, for generations, been embraced by the public as "the first self-made *black* female millionaire" or "the first self-made *female* millionaire" who gave to many charitable causes. This study is the first to consider Walker within the context of these important historiographies. It expands our knowledge of her giving by integrating investigation of her financial gifts and generosity with her associational networks and business operations. It builds upon our knowledge of the causes she supported by developing and contextualizing in greater depth the motivations and influences behind her giving. In the process, it exposes how race, class, and gender shaped Walker's philanthropy and, for that matter, the philanthropy of other women like her who were entrepreneurs and focused on racial uplift.

This study also moves beyond Walker's personal practice of philanthropy to further illuminate the broader philanthropic action of black women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It displays the interconnectedness between black social institutions and their role in connecting people, issues, and resources across time and space with great effect.

Finally, this study complicates prevailing views on wealth and the responsibilities of those who hold it. Walker was neither an elite philanthropist, in traditional American terms, nor a mass giver, in traditional populist terms. She expands our understanding of how giving in the middle functioned to meet social needs. As a result, this study assembles an alternate view on the role and usage of wealth by individuals during this historical era.

Scope and Limitations

This study will focus primarily on a range of activities broadly identified as being philanthropic based on the history and tradition of African American philanthropy which recognizes forms of giving that are monetary and non-monetary; large and small; formal and informal; tangible and intangible; externally-directed toward others and internally-directed toward extended kinship or community-based networks. For Walker, these activities included her promotion of personal hygiene, her provision of education through a chain of beauty schools, her creation of employment and career opportunities, her lifetime financial gifts, her testamentary charitable gift provisions, her participation in associational networks, and her use of the MCJWMC's structure and resources. In the process, this study also examines the *idea of Walker*—that is, the ways in which the MCJWMC used her name, story, legacy, memory, and likeness after her death to inculcate philanthropic values into Walker agents and beauty school students. What is more, the *idea of Walker* was not only useful to the MCJWMC, it was embraced by African Americans, more generally, as a cultural, inspirational, and aspirational narrative that testified to their own humanity, dignity, generosity, and potentiality, and ran counter

to the larger, negative, and pervasive Jim Crow societal narratives that denigrated them and reinforced the status quo. The *idea of Walker* has formed the foundation for the potency of Walker's legacy nearly one hundred years after her death, and philanthropy was a major component of it.

Although this dissertation engages the topic of philanthropic giving across Walker's lifespan and beyond, its scope is not a comprehensive biography. Consequently, it does not provide a detailed investigation into her daily lived experience and its concomitant nuances from birth to death.⁸¹ Rather, it draws upon the existing biographical works on Walker, along with primary sources from archival collections, to identify and present Walker's many philanthropic activities in full view of her known biography and the trajectory of her life's story.

Methodology

This study is based on a critical examination of the historical record of Madam C.J. Walker. This study excavates philanthropic action from that record using historical methods and archival research. Walker did not publish texts about her giving in ways similar to those of her white philanthropic contemporaries.⁸² Walker biographer and descendent, A'Lelia Bundles has suggested that perhaps Walker—who worked and travelled constantly to build her business right up until a few weeks before her death—

⁸¹ See A'Lelia Bundles, *On Her Own Ground: The Life and Times of Madam C.J. Walker* (New York: Washington Square Press, 2001).

⁸² See Andrew Carnegie, "Wealth," *North American Review* 148, 391 (1889): 653-664; Margaret Olivia Sage, "Opportunities and Responsibilities of Leisured Women," *North American Review* 181, 588 (1905): 712-721; John D. Rockefeller, *Random Remembrances of Men and Events* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1913).

was too busy to write about her philanthropy in such a manner.⁸³ It is more likely that she did not have a chance to compose written statements on her philanthropy because her relatively early death at the age of 51 occurred at the height of her philanthropic activity, when she would have been best positioned to capture her experiences and ideas related to giving. However, while she may not have written extensively about her giving, she certainly lived it. She spoke about it in public venues, she referenced it in company marketing promotions and internal communications, and corresponded with her attorney, Freeman B. Ransom, about it. In essence, her life was her essay on philanthropy. Consequently, this study analyzes Walker's correspondences, speeches, marketing materials, company records, newspaper accounts, and other primary sources to assemble and conceptualize her gospel of giving—that is, her thoughts, beliefs, and practices for helping others. Similarly, the idea of Walker, as it was used by the MCJWMC after Walker's death to extend her gospel of giving, is developed in this study through the examination of organizational documents, beauty school manuals, yearbooks, ritualistic ceremonies, and testamentary documents.

Chapter Outline

This study contains an introduction section and four chapters in support of its investigation into Madam C.J. Walker's philanthropy. Chapter One, entitled "Sarah Breedlove and the Making of Madam C.J. Walker's Moral Imagination" examines the life experiences, individuals, and institutions that influenced Walker's understanding of

⁸³ A'Lelia Bundles, personal communication to author, March 5, 2010. Additionally, since the black press meticulously covered Walker's travels around the country, including some of her giving, and the white press also typically included her giving in articles about her, she may have felt no need or urgency to write specifically about philanthropy.

the problems facing blacks and her responsibility to address those problems. The moral imagination is what compels individuals to voluntarily act on the behalf of others for the common good.⁸⁴ Walker's moral imagination was influenced by her experiences as a black migrant in late nineteenth-century St. Louis, Missouri, who was helped by generous clubwomen, churchwomen, and supportive black self-help institutions; and her conversion and loyalty to the African Methodist Episcopal Church and its social gospel which focused on the plight of blacks in America and Africa. These forces continually shaped her worldview and resulting philanthropic commitments.

Chapter Two, entitled "The Madam C.J. Walker Manufacturing Company of Indiana: A Commercial and Philanthropic Institution," reveals Walker's company to have been not just a commercial venture, but an extension of the self-help institution-building practices of African Americans that began during the post-Reconstruction era and continued well into the twentieth century. Walker viewed the company as an institution to advance the race by helping its women prosper economically and contribute philanthropically to their communities. Walker's training of sales agents through the company and beauty culturists through her network of beauty schools reflected the emphases of black clubwomen's philanthropic programs. Further, her organization of sales agents into benevolent associations resembled her experiences within NACW's network that engaged black women in philanthropy and activism. Later, after her death, the MCJWMC used the idea of Walker, along with black fraternal ritual, to inculcate philanthropic values into its agents, build respect for beauty culture as a profession, and engage in charitable activities and protest to improve black communities. Finally,

⁸⁴ Robert Payton and Michael Moody, *Understanding Philanthropy: Its Meaning and Mission* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008).

Walker's business and personal relationship with her attorney, Freeman B. Ransom, was the engine behind her philanthropy as he advised, directed, and recorded her giving.

Chapter Three, entitled "'For the Highest Development of the Race: Conceptualizing Madam Walker's Philanthropy'" identifies the types of gifts that Walker made both during her lifetime and after. Patterns emerge across these types of gift that reflected Walker's core values, commitments, and concerns as a black woman creating and redistributing her wealth concurrently. Walker also leveraged her gifts to enhance her own standing and that of her company. The resulting mix of gifts and motivations yields incredible insights into the private and commercial uses of philanthropic giving long before corporate giving became a standard practice for industry. Additionally, this chapter provides an analysis of Walker's will and other testamentary documents to identify the relationships, causes, and institutions most dear to Walker.

Finally, Chapter Four, entitled "Madam C.J. Walker's Gospel of Giving" concludes the study by interpreting the whole of Walker's philanthropic activities. Walker actively lived a non-compartmentalized philanthropy that naturally blended into her routine living and was illustrative of what has come to be considered the African American philanthropic tradition. This chapter articulates Walker's philosophy of philanthropy as a gospel of giving rooted in the black religious and black self-help ethos of her time and focused on education and racial uplift. This philosophy also yields a particular view of wealth and the responsibility of those who hold it to give while accumulating it rather than after. Walker's giving emerges as a critically important model of how the historical experience of black women forged and advanced a ubiquitous kind of American philanthropy characteristically expressed and continually executed through

any and all available means. Walker and black women's philanthropy not only complicate our understanding of the prevailing historical narratives about American philanthropy, but urge our reconsideration and reconstruction of them. As an emerging interdisciplinary field, philanthropic studies provides a method for approaching this task.

CHAPTER ONE:
SARAH BREEDLOVE AND THE MAKING OF
MADAM C.J. WALKER’S MORAL IMAGINATION

“In the history of no people has [the washerwoman’s] example been paralleled, in no other figure in the Negro group can be found a type measuring up to the level of this philanthropic spirit in unselfish service.”

–Carter G. Woodson (1930)¹

Robert Payton and Michael Moody borrowed the concept of the moral imagination from the discipline of anthropology and adapted it for use in philanthropic studies to explain the moral actions and motivations of philanthropists.² In their application, they described philanthropy, in general, as “the social history of the moral imagination,” and they named philanthropic action as “the exercise of the moral imagination.”³ In this context, the moral imagination enables philanthropic agents to consider the suffering of others and name that suffering as a reality that needs to be changed. In the process, these individuals envision or imagine new, improved realities in which that suffering is alleviated, and they are moved to take action to bring those new realities into existence.

¹ Carter G. Woodson, “The Negro Washerwoman, A Vanishing Figure,” *Journal of Negro History*, 15, 3 (July, 1930): 270.

² Anthropologist Clifford Geertz applied the phrase “the social history of the moral imagination” to describe the ways in which anthropologists interpret and translate their field observations of the different peoples and cultures they study. See Clifford Geertz, “Found in Translation: The Social History of the Moral Imagination,” *Georgia Review*, 31, 4 (1977): 788-810. The concept of moral imagination has philosophical roots in the works of a range of writers such as Plato, Immanuel Kant, Adam Smith, and Edmund Burke.

³ Robert Payton and Michael Moody, *Understanding Philanthropy: Its Meaning and Mission* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 22. In this phrasing, the use of the term social history refers to the ways in which people have used their deeply held values to inspire and guide their voluntary actions to improve society over time.

The moral imagination is a versatile concept. It can help explain entire cultures and societies as well as individuals and groups. History is one of many disciplines that has found uses for it.⁴ Gertrude Himmelfarb applied this concept of the moral imagination to late Victorian England to explain that society's view of the poor, who among the poor were deserving of help, and how best to deliver that help.⁵ In the process, she highlighted individuals in English society whose actions and agendas best exemplified and helped to realize the moral imagination of the whole. Payton and Moody also applied the concept to individuals in the history of American philanthropy such as Benjamin Franklin, Andrew Carnegie, and John D. Rockefeller, whom they called "effective entrepreneurs with vivid moral imaginations," because their giving was directed toward an astonishing array of issues and causes at exceptionally large scales.⁶

Payton and Moody identified philanthropy as "the primary vehicle people use to implement their moral imagination and to shape and advance the moral agenda of our society."⁷ An individual's moral imagination is shaped by many forces, including identity, ethnicity, culture, experience, political context, historical context, and moral values. Consequently, analysis of someone's philanthropic action provides insights into elements of that person's moral imagination. There were several important factors that influenced Madam C.J. Walker, but her philanthropy can be best understood as having emerged out of her experiences as a poor, black, female migrant moving around the South dependent upon a robust philanthropic infrastructure of black civil society

⁴ Other fields that have applied and refined the concept include literature, education, ethics, child development, business management and ethics, and cognitive science.

⁵ Gertrude Himmelfarb, *Poverty and Compassion: The Moral Imagination of the Late Victorians* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1991).

⁶ Robert Payton and Michael Moody, *Understanding Philanthropy: Its Meaning and Mission* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 133.

⁷ Robert Payton and Michael Moody, *Understanding Philanthropy: Its Meaning and Mission* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 99.

institutions and individuals who cared for and mentored her through the most difficult period of her life. Consequently, the concept of the moral imagination provides a useful lens for viewing Madam C.J. Walker and the emergence of her philanthropic action over time; however, this story does not begin with Madam Walker, but rather with Sarah Breedlove.

Sarah Breedlove's Early Life Experiences, Birth to 1889

Black, female, orphan, child laborer, wife, mother, widow, single mother, migrant—Sarah Breedlove was all of these things before the age of twenty-two during a time that was difficult and hostile for many, but particularly so for a black woman born to former slaves and who lived in the deep and emerging Jim Crow South of the late nineteenth century. Sarah's first few breaths of life on December 23, 1867 were taken as a free person, unlike those of her parents, Owen and Minerva Breedlove, and her older siblings who had lived as slaves on the Burney plantation in Delta, Louisiana.⁸ Having been freed from the bondages of slavery by a range of advocacy, military, presidential, and legislative actions—that included the antebellum Abolitionist movement, the Civil War from 1861 to 1865, President Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, and the states' ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment in 1865—Owen and Minerva were likely proud of the fact that their infant would not have to know the horrors of the American slave system as they had. Having been born free, Sarah Breedlove was set for a different trajectory than the nearly four million African Americans who were just

⁸ A'Lelia Bundles, *On Her Own Ground: The Life and Times of Madam C.J. Walker* (New York: Washington Square Press, 2001), 25-27. This chapter blends biographical understanding of Walker based on Bundles' work with analysis of primary and secondary sources to investigate the formation of Walker's moral imagination.

beginning to breathe the new air of freedom. But even her proud and hopeful parents likely never imagined nor even had a point of reference for grasping what their newborn would achieve later in life.

Although their exact birthdates are unknown, Owen and Minerva had been a part of the Burney plantation since 1847.⁹ Few details are known about their specific experiences there, but Louisiana was known for its particularly brutal form of slavery.¹⁰ In this context, Owen and Minerva had four children before Sarah was born—Louvenia, Alexander, James, and Owen. Solomon was born two years after Sarah and was the second and last child born free. Their family unit was very important to them. Although marriages and other familial relationships were not recognized by the system of slavery, Owen and Minerva officially married early in their emancipation, along with thousands of other former slaves, as this essential relationship was recognized by the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands (Freedmen's Bureau), the federal agency charged by Congress to help the mass of people newly freed from slavery. The Breedlove family was part of the Pollard Church of Delta, Louisiana, a Baptist church pastored by Reverend Pollard, a man who was not only a religious leader, but also a political leader who participated in the reconstructed state government of Louisiana. Walker biographer A'Lelia Bundles surmised that young Sarah likely learned the rudiments of literacy from programming at Pollard Church.¹¹

⁹ A'Lelia Bundles, *On Her Own Ground: The Life and Times of Madam C.J. Walker* (New York: Washington Square Press, 2001), 26.

¹⁰ W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America 1860-1880* (1935; repr., New York: Atheneum, 1992), 453.

¹¹ A'Lelia Bundles, *On Her Own Ground: The Life and Times of Madam C.J. Walker* (New York: Washington Square Press, 2001), 34.

Owen and Minerva did not have much time to enjoy their new freedom or their legally recognized marriage and family. Both died within a few years of Sarah's birth. Minerva died first. Owen remarried, but also succumbed within a few years. By the age of seven, Sarah was orphaned and in the care of her older sister and brother-in-law, Louvenia and Jesse Powell.¹²

While Sarah was born during a moment of freedom in American history commonly known as Reconstruction, she had barely reached ten years of age before that new reality began to unravel at the hand of an avenging, belligerent, and resentful white South determined to restore order by retaking control of its state governments and returning African Americans to positions of subordination and peonage. The Civil War had ended, the slaves were emancipated, and the bloodied yet preserved union was trying to piece itself back together. Four million freed blacks were trying to comprehend and execute their recently acknowledged and acquired liberties. A collection of massive governmental, religious, and philanthropic actions led to new policies, reforms, and initiatives towards the goal of engaging freed blacks as citizens.

Governmental actions involved ratification of the Thirteenth (1865), Fourteenth (1868), and Fifteenth (1870) Amendments to the U.S. Constitution and a series of Reconstruction Acts (1867), which abolished slavery, affirmed the citizenship of blacks, extended voting rights, and established military rule in the South to safe guard the black population and reinforce reforms respectively. Black males were enfranchised and many black officials were elected to state and federal offices. The federal Freedmen's Bureau implemented a range of programs to aid blacks in areas related to housing, labor, health care, education, and participation in the court system. W.E.B. Du Bois called the effort

¹² "Queen of Gotham's Colored 400," *Literary Digest* 55 (October 13, 1917): 75-76.

“an extraordinary piece of work,” and estimated that the Bureau had spent \$18 million on the freedmen, but he viewed the effort as largely unsuccessful because of inherent structural flaws in its design and implementation.¹³ Religious responses involved missionary programs focused on meeting blacks’ educational, health, and social needs. These types of responses included the establishment of schools and colleges. The philanthropic actions included the aforementioned missionary efforts along with the creation of the first formal foundations that would become important players in addressing the educational needs of the newly freed slaves, such as the Peabody Education Fund (1867) and the Slater Fund (1882).

The philanthropic response especially included efforts of blacks to help themselves. Following a long period of involvement in abolition, several blacks and black organizations continued their establishment of initiatives and institutions to meet the needs of their people. They created churches, schools, colleges, old folks’ homes, orphanages, businesses, social services, fraternal organizations, and a range of advocacy associations. Along with such formal efforts, many informal practices of giving and sharing were staples in the survival mechanisms of blacks who had to interact and collaborate with each other to navigate the difficulties of American life.¹⁴ The dynamics of this period not only provided important context for the social, political, economic, and cultural environment into which Sarah was born, but also delimited the contours of the black experience in America for decades to come.

¹³ W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America 1860-1880* (1935; repr., New York: Atheneum, 1992), 230, 227.

¹⁴ Emmett Carson, *A Hand Up: Black Philanthropy and Self-Help in America* (Washington D.C.: Joint Center for the Study of Economics and Political Science, 1993); Adrienne Lash Jones, “Philanthropy in the African American Experience,” in *Giving: Western Ideas of Philanthropy* ed. J. B Schneewind (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 153-178.

The situation for blacks was dire during early Reconstruction. On the whole, they had no wealth, property, or education, and upwards of 90% were illiterate.¹⁵ Their family members had been separated and dispersed by slavery across the South. They were legally freed, but that freedom had to be operationalized and American society had to be re-conceptualized and reorganized accordingly. Reconstruction was an attempt to do so and enabled blacks to assert their newly found freedom under the protection of 20,000 federal troops stationed throughout the South. Historian Eric Foner has noted how the situation began to improve: “By the early 1870s, biracial democratic government, something unknown in American history, was functioning effectively in many parts of the South.”¹⁶ Before the war, blacks could only vote in a small number of northern states, and black elected officials were nonexistent. After the war and because of Reconstruction, blacks could vote and as many as 2,000 African Americans held elected office. As such historic gains were achieved, white Southerners began to feel powerless and resorted to terrorist tactics to protest the apparent rise of blacks to power. According to Foner at least 10% of black elected officials were victims of threats and assaults, while at least 35 were murdered by the Ku Klux Klan, a white supremacist group founded in Tennessee in 1866 whose membership was swelling across the South.¹⁷ Groups such as the White Brotherhood and the Knights of the White Camelia added to the violence. Individual acts of violence evolved into mass mob violence in which entire towns were devastated as blacks or their white sympathizers were run from their homes and

¹⁵ W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America 1860-1880* (1935; repr., New York: Atheneum, 1992), 57.

¹⁶ Eric Foner, *Forever Free: The Story of Emancipation and Reconstruction* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2005), 129.

¹⁷ Eric Foner, *Forever Free: The Story of Emancipation and Reconstruction* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2005), 134.

communities or lynched. In 1873, Colfax, Louisiana, a town less than 200 miles from Sarah's home in Delta, was the site of what historian Eric Foner called the "bloodiest single act of carnage in Reconstruction," in which more than 50 black militia members were killed by a mob of armed whites who attacked the town.¹⁸ Such violence along with the emergence of Jim Crow, local laws and statutes enacted by white Southerners to counteract the effects of Reconstruction, created hostile living conditions for blacks and slowly pushed them into a dehumanized second-class citizenship with extraordinary restrictions and limitations on their rights, movements, and opportunities.

On the heels of the 1876 election, the demise of Reconstruction was secured when political maneuverings led the new president, Rutherford B. Hayes, to recognize the Democrats' control of the South and discontinue Reconstruction efforts.¹⁹ The end of Reconstruction brought many changes for African Americans and would mark the beginning of what historian Rayford Logan called the "nadir" of African American history.²⁰ Historian Kenneth Stampp summed it up when he wrote: "As for the Negroes, they would have to struggle for another century to regain what they had won—and then lost—in the years of radical reconstruction."²¹ For African Americans, the aftermath of Reconstruction's end resulted in increased violence and terror, political disenfranchisement, second-class citizenship, and denial of equal opportunity.

For the members of the Breedlove family, these events were not distant occurrences. They were happening in their own community of Delta, Louisiana. Historian

¹⁸ Eric Foner, *Forever Free: The Story of Emancipation and Reconstruction* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2005), 173.

¹⁹ Eric Foner, *Forever Free: The Story of Emancipation and Reconstruction* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2005), 198.

²⁰ Rayford Logan, *The Negro in American Life and Thought: The Nadir 1877-1901* (New York: Dial Press, 1954).

²¹ Kenneth Stampp, *The Era of Reconstruction, 1865-1877* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), 185.

Nell Irvin Painter identified 1871 as the beginning of Reconstruction's demise in Louisiana due to a range of local reactionary activities by whites and increasingly difficult living conditions across the state.²² With nearby lynchings, difficult labor conditions, and a boll weevil infestation that devastated local crops, there was not much appeal or reason to stay in Delta. Sarah's parents were deceased and her older brothers had already gone to St. Louis, Missouri, in search of better opportunity. So, in 1878, at the age of 11, Sarah, Louvenia, and Jesse left Delta for Vicksburg, Mississippi, just on the other side of the Mississippi River, in search of jobs and in flight from white terror, economic hardship, and a yellow fever outbreak.²³ It was during her time in Vicksburg that Sarah's life course was changed by important events, some of which became hallmarks of the story Madam Walker would later tell about her humble beginnings.

Around 1878, Sarah began working as a washerwoman, also called laundress, in Vicksburg, Mississippi. More than thirty years later, this life as a washerwoman loomed large in the moral imagination of Madam Walker as evidenced by her use of it as a staple in her speeches. In a 1912 speech before Booker T. Washington's National Negro Business League, Madam Walker asserted: "I have been trying to get before you business people and tell you what I am doing. I am a woman that came from the cotton fields of the South; I was promoted from there to the wash-tub...and from there I promoted myself into the business of manufacturing hair goods and preparations."²⁴ Having been a laundress was clearly an essential part of Madam Walker's identity and her experience of

²² Nell Irvin Painter, *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas after Reconstruction* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1977), 16.

²³ "Madam C.J. Walker," *Indianapolis Freeman*, November 11, 1911, p. 1; "America's Foremost Colored Woman," *Indianapolis Freeman*, December 28, 1912, p. 3; A'Lelia Bundles, *On Her Own Ground: The Life and Times of Madam C.J. Walker* (New York: Washington Square Press, 2001), 36.

²⁴ William H. Davis. *Report of the Thirteenth Annual Convention of the National Negro Business League* (Washington D.C.: 1912), 154.

such laborious, low-wage work was the inspiration for a different life. But this job did not just serve as a basis for Walker's personal narrative of ascent, it stood as a constant reminder for her of the troubled state of employment for black women characterized by few options, horrendous working conditions, and even worse remuneration. Working as a laundress was back-breaking labor as one could spend the better part of the work day hunched over a tub of boiling water breathing in and having one's skin irritated by the chemical fumes from cleaning agents used to sanitize clothing. Bundles explained that washerwomen typically brought home laundry loads from two or three white families on Mondays to begin the week long process of washing dozens upon dozens of sheets, towels, pillowcases, and clothing. This strenuous routine continued on a weekly basis, and Sarah seldom made more than \$1.50 per day.²⁵

Besides such general accounts, little is known about Sarah's washerwoman experience beyond what she said about it. But historiography has yielded some insights about the experiences of black washerwomen during the late nineteenth century that are instructive. In 1890, 151,540 black women worked as washerwomen and their numbers increased to 218,227 by 1900.²⁶ But their numbers would gradually decrease as the twentieth century unfolded. More than a decade following Madam Walker's death, historian Carter G. Woodson lamented the black washerwoman's increasing status as "a vanishing figure" given the rapid industrial, economic, and technological forces that had long automated her services by the early twentieth century.²⁷ Woodson venerated the

²⁵ "Wealthiest Negro Woman's Suburban Mansion," *New York Times Magazine*, November 4, 1917; A'Lelia Bundles, *On Her Own Ground: The Life and Times of Madam C.J. Walker* (New York: Washington Square Press, 2001), 46.

²⁶ Carter G. Woodson, "The Negro Washerwoman, a Vanishing Figure," *Journal of Negro History* 15, 3 (July, 1930): 269.

²⁷ Carter G. Woodson, "The Negro Washerwoman, a Vanishing Figure," *Journal of Negro History* 15, 3 (July, 1930): 269.

black washerwoman as a cornerstone figure in the black community who labored with great love and in great sacrifice for her family and her people. Woodson traced the history of the black washerwoman to slave women who maintained household duties for the wives of their masters and to free black women in the antebellum North who supplemented their husbands' diminished earning power through their labor. In the former case, slave washerwomen were heads of household whose family units were constantly shifting at the whims of their masters due to the selling and breeding of male slaves. For the latter, free washerwomen were frequently the breadwinners as their husbands were locked out of labor unions and other trades. Further, given the tenuous nature of freedom following Emancipation, washerwomen again became breadwinners providing their families with money or food bartered for their services. Woodson noted that washerwomen, as economic agents, frequently took the lead in buying homes for their families, paying tuition for their children's education, supporting their husbands in training in the professions, and funding business capital for new enterprises that offered the hope of employment in the community.²⁸ What is more, washerwomen, according to Woodson, regularly gave money to help the less-fortunate despite their own great need. For all of these reasons, Woodson memorialized the black washerwoman: "In the history of no people has [the washerwoman's] example been paralleled, in no other figure in the Negro group can be found a type measuring up to the level of this philanthropic spirit in unselfish service." For Woodson, the black washerwoman's sacrificial toil and unbounded generosity made her the quintessential philanthropist among African Americans.

²⁸ Carter. G. Woodson, "The Negro Washerwoman, a Vanishing Figure," *Journal of Negro History*, 15, 3 (July, 1930): 269-277.

The washerwomen's generosity was perhaps only surpassed by their creativity. Their lives were difficult due to challenging work conditions and very low wages. To compensate, washerwomen and other working-class black women domestic workers resorted to what historian Tera Hunter called "consumption strategies" such as scavenging, borrowing, bartering, and pan-toting to provide for their families in lieu of money. These practices procured food, clothing, and other items desperately needed that the women shared and distributed amongst themselves to provide for their families. The social networks amongst these working women became "casual mechanisms of mutual aid" which catalyzed the creation of formal networks and institutions, such as churches, secret societies, mutual aid and benevolent organizations, labor unions, and political leagues.²⁹ Consequently, the highly educated, middle-class black club and churchwomen of the era were not the only black women organizing. These networks helped washerwomen and other working-class women support each other through sickness, tragedies, and other life challenges. Further, once the informal networks became formal organizations, they frequently offered death benefits and other forms of financial assistance leveraged from the dues paid by members. But these networks and organizations also helped working-class black women become politically engaged and advocate for themselves and their communities.

For instance, washerwomen in Atlanta, Georgia, created Washing Societies in the late nineteenth century, and communities of washerwomen in other portions of the South engaged in public protest of their working conditions. In 1866, washerwomen in Jackson, Mississippi, protested their harsh labor conditions by organizing and collectively

²⁹ Tera Hunter. *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 67.

informing the mayor that they were going to institute uniform pricing to enable them to make an honest living and afford the bare necessities for their families. In 1877, around the same time that Sarah first began working as a washerwoman in Vicksburg, Mississippi, a group of working women in Galveston, Texas, organized their own protest to demand an increase in pay. And in 1881, members of the Washing Society in Atlanta, Georgia, staged their own strike in order to set a uniform pay rate to protect themselves from low wages. In the process, the Washing Society created effective funding and recruitment mechanisms to support its protests, all of which grew out of, what Hunter termed, the communal work of laundry. These organizations and mechanisms would later help washerwomen in Atlanta stave off threats from industrialized laundries and unjust court fines and taxation proposals.³⁰

Little is known about the specific community of black washerwomen in Vicksburg, Mississippi, (and later in St. Louis, Missouri) that Sarah may have been a part of during the late nineteenth century. However, this historical background provides a basis for understanding washerwomen as another community network of influence and support that may have aided and inspired Sarah during this most difficult time in her life. While remembering the experience near the end of her life, Walker stated, “I was considered a good washerwoman and laundress. I am proud of that fact.”³¹ She certainly disliked being a washerwoman, but it may have been the case that local washerwomen in Vicksburg and St. Louis helped her to survive and may also have influenced her moral imagination and ideas about creating employment for black women.

³⁰ Tera Hunter. *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 91, 94.

³¹ “Wealthiest Negro Woman's Suburban Mansion,” *New York Times Magazine*, November 4, 1917, p. 4.

Within three years of arriving in Vicksburg, Sarah married a man named Moses McWilliams. Sarah married McWilliams in order to get away from her abusive brother-in-law, Jesse, and to establish a home of her own.³² McWilliams fathered Sarah's daughter, Lelia, who was born in 1885 when Sarah was just 17. But this new family experience for Sarah was short lived as McWilliams died before the end of the decade. Before the age of 22, Sarah had married, birthed a child, lost her husband, and found herself a single mother in the deep South—a devastating sequence of events.

Although living in Vicksburg under such circumstances was certainly challenging, it afforded Sarah exposure to an emerging black civil society that likely captured her imagination. The developing black community of Vicksburg attracted black migrants from neighboring states and consequently a robust gamut of black benevolent and social organizations evolved. Churches were among these groups, but many other groups flourished as well. The Order of Colored Knights of Pythias, the Negro Masons, and the Grand United Order of Odd Fellows were particularly active and known for their vibrant parades which were always community-wide spectacles.³³ These benevolent organizations were comprised of men, but they also had women's auxiliaries that were very active. Sarah would have observed these men and women in action serving their community. These types of civic and community activities were not unique to Vicksburg; they occurred throughout the South as blacks created organizations and institutions to meet their social, educational, religious, and political needs in a frenetic explosion of

³² "Queen of Gotham's Colored 400," *Literary Digest* 55 (October 13, 1917), 75-76.

³³ A'Lelia Bundles, *On Her Own Ground: The Life and Times of Madam C.J. Walker* (New York: Washington Square Press, 2001), 41.

activity during post-Reconstruction.³⁴ These organizations in Vicksburg were likely Sarah's first meaningful exposure to the black self-help ethos that was pervasive during the national failure of Reconstruction and increasing white hostility toward blacks. Lynchings were happening throughout Mississippi and across the South. Left widowed with a child, Sarah fled Vicksburg for St. Louis, Missouri, just like tens of thousands of southern blacks known as "Exodusters" who had headed west away from the terror of the South a decade earlier.

Sarah Breedlove, *Black Migrant in St. Louis, 1889-1905*

The Great Black Migration out of the South into the North is commonly considered to have started on the eve of World War I and continued for decades later.³⁵ But its roots trace back to the late nineteenth century when blacks like Sarah, in much smaller numbers, moved around the South before eventually leaving for good. Historian Kimberly Phillips described early migration patterns in the 1880s that were incremental and reactive: "as [blacks] encountered organized political, social, and economic repression in rural areas, they moved to nearby towns and cities in search of better work conditions and a modicum of safety. When violence and segregation laws became common and work opportunities diminished, blacks responded with a [sic] mass and permanent departures to other regions."³⁶ Such conditions certainly explained Sarah, Louvenia, and Jesse's movement from Delta, Louisiana, to Vicksburg, Mississippi, in

³⁴ Adrienne Lash Jones, "Philanthropy in the African American Experience," in *Giving: Western Ideas of Philanthropy*, ed. J.B. Schneewind (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 162.

³⁵ Mark Andrew Huddle, "Exodus from the South," in *A Companion to African American History*, ed. Alton Hornsby, Jr. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 450.

³⁶ Kimberly Phillips, *Daily Life during African American Migrations* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2012), 2.

1878. But Sarah's departure from Vicksburg, Mississippi, to St. Louis, Missouri, in 1889 finds context in an earlier episode in black migration history.

Historian Nell Irvin Painter documented the migration of between 4,000 and 5,000 black "Exodusters," who, starting in 1879, left the South for Kansas in search of new communities befitting their new freedom.³⁷ While the largest single wave of black migrants arrived in Kansas in the early 1880s, the trend continued such that the state's black population more than doubled to over 43,000 by the 1890s. Arkansas and other contiguous states saw similar black population trends.³⁸

Sarah's movement from Delta, Louisiana, to Vicksburg, Mississippi, in 1878 preceded the start of this mini-migration by a few months. Sarah likely heard about Kansas and St. Louis from the Exodusters who left from or passed through Vicksburg, which was a main point of departure due to its location on the Mississippi River. St. Louis was a main way station en route to Kansas and was only 500 miles north along the river. Painter captured the lure of St. Louis for the Exodusters:

St. Louis occupied a pivotal position in the mythology of the Exodus. It linked the two parts of the idea, negative and positive, slavery and freedom. The first step, and the most decisive, took Exodusters out of the South, beyond the grasp of re-enslavement. Arriving in Kansas, where there had never been any slavery and where salvation awaited, represented the final step. If they only got out of the South, Exodusters would automatically reach Kansas on the strength of their belief in the idea. The crucial point was St. Louis. When Exodusters reached that city they were out of danger: they had done their part. St. Louis was like the Red Sea, explained an Exoduster, drawing a parallel between Southern Black people and the Israelites.³⁹

³⁷ Nell Irvin Painter, *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas after Reconstruction* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1977), 256.

³⁸ Kimberly Phillips, *Daily Life during African American Migrations* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2012), 12.

³⁹ Nell Irvin Painter, *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas after Reconstruction* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1977), 195.

While Sarah was not an Exoduster herself, her entry into St. Louis was greatly influenced by the Exodusters since it was their overwhelming and impecunious presence in the city over the preceding decade that had caused St. Louis' black churches and benevolent organizations to rally and provide resources and support services for arriving migrants. Relief activities for black migrants arriving in St. Louis began in March 1879, when Charleton H. Tandy, a local black politician, appealed to the city for funds. His appeal was initially denied, even though help was being administered to other non-black migrants. Eventually \$100 was granted by the city for all of the black migrants, but this sum greatly paled in comparison to the amounts of up to \$300 each that were given to white migrant families passing through the city.⁴⁰ Following this denial of support, the local black community organized a fundraising appeal for relief and began housing arriving migrants with local families. St. Paul African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church hosted a meeting on the question of how to help the migrants, and a group called the Committee of Twenty-Five emerged as the Colored Relief Board to coordinate the black community's response to the migrants. St. Paul's and two local Baptist churches became shelters for the Exodusters, and housed between 150-350 migrants.⁴¹ Using donations of food and money, the local black community supported the Exodusters for over a month before word spread across the country and charitable donations were sent by individual whites and black communities. The Colored Relief Board evolved into the Colored People's Board of Emigration of the City of St. Louis and expanded its activities to include sending representatives to Kansas to ensure the migrants who passed through

⁴⁰ Nell Irvin Painter, *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas after Reconstruction* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1977), 225.

⁴¹ Nell Irvin Painter, *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas after Reconstruction* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1977), 226.

their city were subsequently faring well given the lack of social services and support on the ground. Tandy travelled the country raising money for the Board, but interest in the Exodus was short lived. The Board continued to operate into the 1880s, but faced increasing hostility from local public officials who did not want black migrants settling in St. Louis. Although the Board did not continue indefinitely, the churches and other community groups remained active in receiving and caring for the migrants. A decade later, Sarah was greeted by this black civic, religious, and philanthropic infrastructure and it made a tremendous difference that would have lasting impact on the widowed single mother who wanted a better life for herself, her daughter, and her people.

If black migrants left the South in search of greater opportunity, Sarah's brothers, Owen, Alexander, James, and Solomon, found it in St. Louis. The four Breedlove brothers opened a barbershop in the black St. Louis neighborhood anchored by the St. Paul AME Church. According to Bundles, St. Louis was home to over 300 black barbers at the time, most of who did well for themselves and their families.⁴² Not wealthy by any means, the Breedlove men were able to provide for themselves and their families in ways that Delta, Louisiana, and Vicksburg, Mississippi, had not allowed. Even still, St. Louis, as a bustling urban industrial center, had its own fair share of social problems including crime, poverty, and prostitution. Nevertheless, Sarah's experiences in St. Louis provide important insights into Madam Walker's philanthropy.

In 1889, Sarah and Lelia arrived in St. Louis with more hope than money. She connected with her family and resumed working as a washerwoman. But as a widow with a child, more support was necessary. Sarah was welcomed into the city by a social

⁴² A'Lelia Bundles, *On Her Own Ground: The Life and Times of Madam C.J. Walker* (New York: Washington Square Press, 2001), 44.

infrastructure undergirded by St. Paul AME Church and its many female members as well as local black clubwomen and social service and benevolent organizations. St. Paul AME Church was the entry point and primary connector for Sarah to this social network. Founded in 1841, St. Paul AME Church had an active base of churchwomen, women who ran ministries and auxiliaries within the church, and clubwomen, members who participated in community clubs outside the church, within its membership.⁴³ Sarah was embraced by these women.

One of the first support services the church connected Sarah to was the St. Louis Colored Orphan's Home, which had recently opened. The home was one of hundreds across the country founded by blacks to care for two of their own most vulnerable populations, children and the elderly. Social welfare scholar Iris Carlton-LaNey noted that both old folks' homes and orphanages proliferated in the years following the Civil War and Reconstruction. While black families had taken in both blood and fictive kin in the aftermath of Emancipation, these old folks' homes and orphanages were founded as key social institutions to meet the widespread needs of the black community given the sheer volume of children and elderly in need and the blatant aggression, discrimination, and neglect exhibited by white social service agencies that refused to serve them.⁴⁴ Frequently founded by black fraternal orders or by black clubwomen, orphanages provided training and moral development for children who were not only neglected, but frequently labeled as "delinquent" by white legal authorities and faced threats of imprisonment. In particular, black clubwomen viewed their child welfare work as an

⁴³ Many of these women were active inside and outside of church. For a scholarly treatment of black women's identities as churchwomen and clubwomen, see Bettye Collier-Thomas, *Jesus, Jobs and Justice: African American Women and Religion* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2010), xv-xxxiv.

⁴⁴ Iris Carlton-LaNey, "Old Folks' Homes for Blacks during the Progressive Era," *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare*, 43 (1989): 43-60.

important component of their overall social reform efforts to improve the race alongside their schools, mother's meetings, day nurseries, kindergartens, and other educational and youth-focused efforts.⁴⁵

The St. Louis Colored Orphan's Home was founded in 1888 by Sarah Newton Cohron, a black graduate of Oberlin College, who was concerned about the lack of services for black orphans. She worked with local religious organizations, including the AME churches like St. Paul's, to raise awareness of the needs of black orphans and launched a campaign to start the home. The home was built on land purchased by black Civil War veterans, and began caring for orphans.⁴⁶ Due to St. Paul AME Church's involvement in the founding of the home, its partnership was natural as black migrants like Sarah entered the city with their children.

The St. Louis Colored Orphan's Home enabled Sarah to work knowing her daughter was being cared for properly. In addition to serving parentless children, the home also served children of single parents and provided them with educational instruction, food, recreation, religious instruction, and sleeping accommodations. Lelia stayed at the home a few days each week while Sarah worked.⁴⁷ The staff at the home also connected Lelia with the local elementary school when she was of age so that her formal schooling could begin. The home's support was of tremendous help to Sarah and gave her a first-hand view of the power of the self-help ethic among blacks to address

⁴⁵ Daniel Levine, "A Single Standard of Civilization: Black Private Social Welfare Institutions in the South, 1880s-1920s," *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, 81, 1 (Spring 1997): 52-77.

⁴⁶ Virginia Gillbert & Barry Gillbert, "Annie Malone Children's Organization Will Celebrate 125 Years of Service" accessed June 27, 2013, https://www.stlbeacon.org/#!/content/28420/125_years_of_annie_malone_121112

⁴⁷ A'Lelia Bundles, *On Her Own Ground: The Life and Times of Madam C.J. Walker* (New York: Washington Square Press, 2001), 46.

community needs despite the widespread neglect and exclusion of the dominant white social service providers and society in general.

It was also through St. Paul AME Church that Sarah became connected with the Court of Calanthe, the women's auxiliary of the black fraternal organization, the Colored Knights of Pythias. Founded as a white fraternal organization in 1864, the Knights of Pythias had denied access to blacks. Following rejection of a petition by a group of black men from Pennsylvania to be accepted into the organization in 1870, the Colored Knights of Pythias was founded in Vicksburg, Mississippi, ten years later. The Knights of Pythias became one of the largest black fraternal orders, and it offered life, burial, or sickness insurance, and operated old folks' homes and orphanages. In 1883, the Knights of Pythias created the Independent Order of Calanthe, and it offered sickness benefits at a cost of \$1 to \$4 per week.⁴⁸ The Court of Calanthe's membership was comprised of knights and their female relatives including spouses, mothers, and siblings. From Vicksburg, the organization expanded across the South and northward.⁴⁹

Jessie Batts Robinson was the friend who introduced Sarah to the Court of Calanthe and convinced her to join. Robinson was a member of St. Paul AME Church and married to Christopher K. Robinson, who held numerous leadership positions with the order. This involvement afforded high visibility as Jessie's husband reportedly had audiences with white public officials and civic leaders on a regular basis. Jessie and Sarah became very close friends, and through Jessie, Sarah gained exposure to a new

⁴⁸ Daniel Levine, "A Single Standard of Civilization: Black Private Social Welfare Institutions in the South, 1880s-1920s," *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, 81, 1 (Spring 1997): 63.

⁴⁹ Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, "African Americans in Pennsylvania: Benevolent, Fraternal and Sororal Societies, and Women's Clubs, 1644-1965" downloaded June 27, 2013, <http://www.yumpu.com/en/browse/user/phmc.state.pa.us/3>; Daniel Levine, "A Single Standard of Civilization: Black Private Social Welfare Institutions in the South, 1880s-1920s," *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, 81, 1 (Spring 1997): 63.

world of literature, etiquette, and culture that was in stark contrast to what she had seen in Delta and Vicksburg.⁵⁰

Along with the Court of Calanthe, Sarah experienced the St. Paul's Mite Missionary Society. Through this society, a group of St. Paul women worked together on various community projects to help needy individuals and families. Given the waves of migration, such projects frequently revolved around black migrants' arrival in the city. Sarah's experience with the women of the Mite Missionary Society was transformational because it positioned her to be of service to others. Having known the experience of being new in an unfamiliar city with no money or connections, Sarah could relate to the migrants and their need for support. The church, the orphan's home, and the Court of Calanthe had all given her access and exposure to new friends, new resources, and new ways of being as she was in close proximity to—even under the tutelage of—black women who were college-educated, had social standing, and were very involved in the local community.

They influenced Sarah and her view of herself, her people, and her world. According to a newspaper article from 1912, Madam Walker once recalled personally knocking on doors during this time in her life to raise money and collect food to help an elderly man who had great difficulty in caring for his family:

⁵⁰ A'Lelia Bundles, *On Her Own Ground: The Life and Times of Madam C.J. Walker* (New York: Washington Square Press, 2001), 57.

It was in St. Louis that the madame [sic] learned that it was truly her mission to relieve the poor and the distressed according as she was able. She read in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, a publication of that city, of an aged colored man with a blind sister and an invalid wife depending upon him for support. The incident touched her heart. Without an acquaintance of any kind with the family, she went among her friends in the behalf of the distressed people, succeeding in collecting [money], which she gave to them. She was so pleased with the joy manifest by the giving that she felt herself not only well paid in the instance, but well enough to enlist her future sympathy. She felt it was her duty to do even more for the poor people spoken of. She arranged for a puppy party through which means groceries in abundance were given, also a purse of \$7.50.⁵¹

It is not clear whether Sarah specifically engaged in such activities because of her relationships with the women in her church and local clubs. But it is clear, as historian Bettye Colliers-Thomas pointed out, that black women's church-based societies, auxiliaries, and conventions were "significant bases of power" that "constituted the backbone of black community philanthropy" during this period.⁵² While under the influence of these groups, which were active inside and outside of the church helping their community in many ways, Sarah transitioned from being a recipient to a donor. She, too, was empowered to help others just as she had been helped. She demonstrated that the ability to give and be helpful to others was contingent upon the willingness to do so rather than financial wealth.

During this time, Sarah also experienced important changes regarding her family while in St. Louis. In 1893, when Sarah was 25, her brother, Alexander, died from an intestinal illness. A year later, she married a man named John Davis, who, by the personal accounts of family and friends, was not a good provider, was frequently

⁵¹ "America's Foremost Colored Woman," *Indianapolis Freeman*, December 28, 1912, p. 16.

⁵² Bettye Collier-Thomas, *Jesus, Jobs and Justice: African American Women and Religion* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2010), xxvi-xxvii.

unemployed, and was fond of alcohol and other women.⁵³ She endured his abuse and infidelities for several years. Later in 1902, Sarah's brother James died of heart disease, followed by her brother Solomon, who died a year later from tubercular meningitis. These losses were no doubt devastating for Sarah, who had already lost her parents at an early age. To compound the situation, her eldest brother Owen had abandoned his wife and left for New Mexico, while her sister, Louvenia, had stayed behind in Mississippi. Sarah thus found herself with her widowed sisters-in-law in St. Louis, married to an unsupportive, even abusive husband. While grieving the demise of her siblings, Sarah separated from John Davis, but did not formally divorce him. She eventually met a young man named Charles Joseph Walker while in St. Louis, whom Bundles described as "a mix of boaster, charmer and self-promoter, fancying himself a natural-born salesman."⁵⁴ Later, his background would become very important to Madam Walker's enterprise.

Even with a new relationship, Sarah's life was still turbulent. She and Lelia had changed residences constantly. Their transient lifestyle was due largely to the instability of urban life, Sarah's tumultuous family life, and meager financial resources. It was partly this transient, unstable existence along with her increasing exposure to new people, ideas, and organizations that led Sarah to put Lelia into boarding school at Knoxville College in Tennessee in 1902. Founded in 1875, the school offered industrial education and normal training for teachers at high school and collegiate levels. While at Knoxville, Lelia studied arithmetic, geography, physiology, sewing, English, elocution, and

⁵³ A'Lelia Bundles, *On Her Own Ground: The Life and Times of Madam C.J. Walker* (New York: Washington Square Press, 2001), 51.

⁵⁴ A'Lelia Bundles, *On Her Own Ground: The Life and Times of Madam C.J. Walker* (New York: Washington Square Press, 2001), 57.

handwriting.⁵⁵ While Lelia was away at school, Sarah, as busy as she was with working as a washerwoman, participating in church, and dealing with family concerns, enrolled in a local night school to improve her own education. She was developing a new sense of herself, possibilities, and the world around her and her place in it. St. Paul AME Church—and in particular the women of the church—was an anchor for Sarah during this most troubling and difficult time in her life, and it was showing her how life could be comprised of more than pain and struggle.

Sarah Breedlove and the African Methodist Episcopal Church

St. Paul A.M.E. Church stood at the center of the organizational and interpersonal network that enabled Sarah and Lelia to survive. Support from St. Paul's enabled Sarah to house, feed, and educate her daughter through its connection with the St. Louis Colored Orphans' Home, which later led Sarah to enroll Lelia at Knoxville College. It enabled Sarah to meet women like Jessie B. Robinson, who inspired her, mentored her, and gave her a sense of alternative ways of being compared to the harsh realities of Delta, Louisiana. It introduced her to organizations like the Court of Calanthe and the St. Paul's Missionary Mite Society, which demonstrated service in action and the strength and resilience of black women serving their community. St. Paul's provided access to night school so Sarah could compensate for the years of no formal education and begin developing a new sense of herself and a new understanding of the world around her. St. Paul's provided a cocoon of supportive educational and social services that enveloped Sarah and Lelia, and positioned them onto a new path that, while still fraught with the

⁵⁵ A'Lelia Bundles, *On Her Own Ground: The Life and Times of Madam C.J. Walker* (New York: Washington Square Press, 2001), 56.

disadvantages and risks of black urban life in a Jim Crow society, offered examples of self-help and collective action to navigate such social ills and a sense of possibility for a future very different than that offered by the Burney plantation of Delta, Louisiana. But St. Paul's offered Sarah more—it gave her a spiritual base that won her devotion and sparked her moral imagination. As a religious institution, St. Paul's introduced Sarah to the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME Church) in a powerful way that would cause her to convert from her Baptist upbringing and spend the rest of her life living in accordance with its doctrines and practices. The AME Church had a history of self-help and voluntary action; print and oral cultures focused on literacy, educational and international missions programs; charitable giving teachings and practices; and active auxiliaries run by women that were very likely attractive to and influential on Sarah.

The AME Church had its beginnings in protest of discrimination by white Methodists. In 1789, Richard Allen (1760-1831) and Absalom Jones (1746-1818), two black members of St. George's Church in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, were physically accosted and forced to leave a whites-only seating section while they were in the midst of prayer.⁵⁶ In protest, Allen, Jones, and several other black members left the church and began holding their own services so they could, according to historian Harry Richardson, “worship without the humiliations imposed by whites but where they could have services suited to their needs.”⁵⁷ As a result of the Methodist practice of denominational ownership of church property and denial of ordination for blacks to serve in full ministry, Allen and Jones faced many challenges in establishing a separate church and acquiring

⁵⁶ There is disagreement in the literature as to whether Allen was actually accosted along with Jones or not, but both did protest and leave the congregation.

⁵⁷ Harry V. Richardson, *Dark Salvation: The Story of Methodism as It Developed among Blacks in America* (Garden City, NY: Anchor-Press/Double Day, 1976), 65.

property. They first created the Free African Society as a benevolent association—one of the first voluntary associations created by blacks in America—that engaged in economic, social, and religious activities and enabled them to hold services. According to its by-laws, the Free African Society’s founding ideal was “free and autonomous worship in the Afro-American tradition, and the solidarity and social welfare of the black community.”⁵⁸ Among its main objectives were the provision of weekly financial support to members’ widows and the poor, and the provision of education for the children of deceased members. The society launched a funding drive to generate resources for the construction of a church building and was aided by Benjamin Rush, a noted white physician, reformer, and abolitionist in Philadelphia. A new building was constructed despite the murmurings of the white denomination.⁵⁹

In 1793, the Free African Society became an important organization for the city of Philadelphia as it faced a deadly yellow fever outbreak. The Society responded to the city’s call for help by providing burial and nursing services during a time when few wanted to handle corpses without significant remuneration. Allen recruited 500 black volunteers who worked over a 70-day period to be of service to the city.⁶⁰ The risk of exposure was great and, in fact, many whites would not touch their own dead, so these black volunteers of Philadelphia provided an important voluntary service for an epidemic that would ultimately kill between 4,000 and 5,000 people.⁶¹ As many as 400 blacks died during the epidemic, among them were many who served in this voluntary capacity. For

⁵⁸ Emmett Carson, *A Hand Up: Black Philanthropy and Self-Help in America* (Washington D.C.: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies Press, 1993), 8.

⁵⁹ There are discrepancies in the historiography as to the exact date of the founding of the Free African Society and whether one or two facilities were built as a result of the early funding drive.

⁶⁰ Richard Allen, *The Life Experience and Gospel Labours of the Rt. Reverend Richard Allen*, 1833, accessed December 14, 2013, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/allen/allen.html>.

⁶¹ Richard S. Newman, *Freedom’s Prophet: Bishop Richard Allen, the AME Church, and the Black Founding Fathers* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 90.

this service, the mayor of Philadelphia praised Allen and the black volunteers.⁶² As the city emerged from the epidemic, the Free African Society continued its array of programming, both social and religious.

In 1794, Bethel Church was constructed, but found itself under the aegis of the white Methodist Conference. The arrangement had implications for fiscal control and property ownership, and initiated a twenty-two year battle between white Methodists and Allen for control that ultimately went all the way to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court. In 1816, Allen and the leaders of other black Methodist congregations along the eastern coast of the United States—having been recently vindicated by the high court—met in Philadelphia to form their own independent denomination, the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME Church), and Allen was elected its first bishop.

To this day, Allen stands as a revered figure in the AME Church as his life story has been handed down through the generations. Throughout the AME Church's two-hundred-year history, the biography of Allen has been regularly and systematically conveyed to successive generations as a narrative of ascent in which Allen arose from slavery nearly 100 years before Frederick Douglass and Booker T. Washington. The veneration held for Allen was evident in early twentieth century church literature which heralded him as the first person, of any race, "to boldly proclaim and practice the 'Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man' in a manner inclusive of all, especially black Christians" as well as "the first American to put the principle of self-help in the so-called Negro Problem."⁶³ Sarah was undoubtedly exposed to the story of Richard Allen,

⁶² Richard S. Newman, *Freedom's Prophet: Bishop Richard Allen, the AME Church, and the Black Founding Fathers* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 90.

⁶³ John H. Smith, *Vital Facts Concerning the African Methodist Episcopal Church: Its Doctrines, Government, Usages, Polity Progress* (Philadelphia, PA: AME Book Concern, 1941), 193, 195.

and likely inspired as well, given her own humble beginnings and having had parents and siblings who were slaves. Common narratives told about Allen in church literature emphasized how he gained his freedom from slavery by “industry and thrift,” and was such a persuasive preacher that he reportedly converted his own master to Christianity which thus enabled him to purchase his own freedom.⁶⁴ Additionally, Church lore described Allen as one of the wealthiest black men in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, who owned property. He was regularly heralded for his respectability, prominence as a citizen of Philadelphia, and ingenuity for owning three businesses while serving as minister and bishop of the church.⁶⁵ Allen’s emphasis on self-help was repeatedly highlighted in church literature, including that he “instructed his people that the only way to be free is to be self-supporting.”⁶⁶ Further, the example of the Free African Society loomed large as a mutual aid, self-help organization out of which the AME Church was born. By establishing the AME Church, Richard Allen and his colleagues achieved an impressive feat in the face of the oppression of slavery and the legal and cultural prohibitions against black literacy, black associationalism, and black interstate travel and communication. These accomplishments included producing the first black Protestant bishop in America, the first interstate organization for blacks in America, and the first black ordained elders in Methodism.⁶⁷ As a member of the AME Church, Sarah would have been constantly surrounded by such inspirational and aspirational narratives focused on leadership, self-help, entrepreneurship, property ownership, achievement, associationalism, and progress.

⁶⁴ John H. Smith, *Vital Facts Concerning the African Methodist Episcopal Church: Its Doctrines, Government, Usages, Polity Progress* (Philadelphia, PA: AME Book Concern, 1941), 198.

⁶⁵ Harry V. Richardson, *Dark Salvation: The Story of Methodism as It Developed among Blacks in America* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press/Double Day, 1976), 82.

⁶⁶ John H. Smith, *Vital Facts Concerning the African Methodist Episcopal Church: Its Doctrines, Government, Usages, Polity Progress* (Philadelphia, PA: AME Book Concern, 1941), 195.

⁶⁷ Harry V. Richardson, *Dark Salvation: The Story of Methodism as It Developed among Blacks in America*, (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press/Double Day, 1976), 83.

The founding story of the AME Church, including its essential leadership and service in the yellow fever epidemic of 1793, has been consistently passed down through the ages via AME culture and lore, and would have been one of the first things Sarah learned about as a new convert.

These ideals were not just exemplified by the leadership and history of the AME Church, they were engrained into its very operation. Historian Julius Bailey examined the A.M.E. Church's rich print culture and tradition of literacy, education, advocacy, and socio-political commentary through denominational publications. Starting with Richard Allen's creation of the AME Book Concern, a publishing house located in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1816, the Church began producing numerous publications, such as the *African Methodist Episcopal Church Magazine* (1841), the *Christian Recorder* (1853), the *Repository of Religion and Literature and of Science and of Art* (1858), and the *AME Church Review* (1884). Together, these publications covered a range of topics including religion, literature, art appreciation, science, child-rearing, moral development, international missions, and other matters the Church believed were related to racial uplift. Of these publications, only the *Christian Recorder* and the *AME Church Review* endured to become major national publications that spoke to the daily realities of black and oppressed people around the world. When AME Church membership exploded from 20,000 in the 1850s to over 450,000 by the end of the 1890s—and continued even higher thereafter—the circulation and subscriptions of these two literary vehicles kept pace, placing them among “the most influential black presses in the country.”⁶⁸ They provided an eager audience for the writings of not only AME ministerial and lay leaders, but also

⁶⁸ Julius Bailey, *Race Patriotism: Protest and Print Culture in the AME Church* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2012), 17.

some of the leading black thinkers of the era, including W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington.

In particular, Bailey argued that the AME Church engaged in a historicization process by producing publications that “were active affirmations of black self-worth and achievement...[and] confident prognostications that were not subject to or always catalyzed by external renderings of the race.”⁶⁹ This process included the aforementioned development of lore surrounding the church’s founding by Richard Allen as protest against white Methodism and white Christianity; the framing of slavery and emancipation in Biblical terms identifying blacks with Scriptural themes and stories of captivity and liberation; and meaning-making surrounding the Civil War and Reconstruction as the upward arc of historical and divine processes sympathetic to the plight of black oppression. According to Bailey, the AME Church used these writings to create “narratives that simultaneously [engaged] the past and present and [portended] particular futures.”⁷⁰ In this manner, the Church was able to ground its membership, and the broader black community, in a meaningful history that offered possibilities that ran counter to the prevailing and restrictive myths about blacks promoted, maintained, and used by white society to justify its superior status and resulting treatment of blacks. This “historical consciousness” found confirmation and relevance in the daily operational context of the AME Church as an institution created and managed by blacks with complete autonomy and authority, and with great beneficial effect in black communities across the country and overseas. The AME Church was not simply preaching, but

⁶⁹ Julius Bailey, *Race Patriotism: Protest and Print Culture in the AME Church* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2012), xii.

⁷⁰ Julius Bailey, *Race Patriotism: Protest and Print Culture in the AME Church* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2012), xv.

actively demonstrating the heritage and the potential of the race. Through these combined efforts, the AME Church “shaped the identity of the race and empowered those of African descent to reach for and achieve greater heights.”⁷¹ As a member of St. Paul’s, Sarah had access to these publications. She likely became a subscriber herself—a common practice for members—once her employment became steady and her own literacy increased through the night school she attended via the church.

The AME Church believed that part of black suffering related to the lack of publicly available role models of black individuals in high positions of authority to serve as examples of a different future. Consequently, it placed great emphasis on providing black teachers for the South during Reconstruction, and was very cognizant throughout its history of providing space and opportunity for blacks to assume leadership roles. In fact, Bishop Daniel Payne, who led the church when Sarah joined it, said the church provided blacks with a “space to rise...[as] every office in the gift of this Church was accessible, and the most meritorious obtained it.”⁷² According to historian Reginald Hildebrand, AME church leaders believed that seeing black people in leadership roles provided “ocular proof” for its membership of the race’s innate intelligence, abilities, and potential, and, therefore, had a powerful inspirational and educational effect.⁷³ Sarah may have had childhood memories of the leadership example of Rev. Pollard from her small hometown church in Delta, Louisiana, but the examples of black leadership in the AME Church’s local, regional, national, and international networks had to have been

⁷¹ Julius Bailey, *Race Patriotism: Protest and Print Culture in the AME Church* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2012), xv.

⁷² Reginald F. Hildebrand, *The Times were Strange and Stirring: Methodist Preachers and the Crisis of Emancipation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 54.

⁷³ Reginald F. Hildebrand, *The Times were Strange and Stirring: Methodist Preachers and the Crisis of Emancipation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 61.

astonishing to her. As was custom, local AME churches like St. Paul's were frequently visited by bishops, officers, and other leaders who preached sermons, presided over events, and brought news of church achievement across the country and overseas. The AME Church had opened up a new world for Sarah.

To reinforce this visual display of black potential and leadership, the AME Church implemented an aggressive agenda in education and international missions. Founding Bishop Richard Allen believed in education as an important component of Christianity and liberation. He implemented programs like a day school to educate children, the Book Concern to promote literacy and development through publishing, and the Society of Free People of Color for Promoting the Instruction and School Education of Children of African Descent.⁷⁴ But it was Daniel Payne, the sixth AME Bishop from 1852-1893, who shaped and implemented the church's educational agenda by overseeing the creation and development of ministerial training, schools, and colleges to provide education for AME clergy and the larger black population. Payne was bishop when Sarah joined St. Paul's, and his education agenda was already in motion with several universities having been founded, including Wilberforce University (1856) in Ohio, Allen University (1870) in South Carolina, Paul Quinn College (1872) in Texas, Morris Brown College (1881) in Georgia, Turner College (1885) in Tennessee, Kittrell College (1886) in North Carolina, Shorter College (1886) in Arkansas, Campbell College (1887) in Mississippi, and Payne University (1889) in Alabama.⁷⁵ After leading the AME takeover of Wilberforce University, Bishop Payne became its president, thereby also becoming the

⁷⁴ E. Curtis Alexander, *Richard Allen: The First Exemplar of African American Education* (New York: ECA Associates, 1985), 97-110.

⁷⁵ James H. Smith, *Vital Facts Concerning the African Methodist Episcopal Church: Its Origins, Doctrines, Government, Usages, Polity Progress* (Philadelphia, PA: AME Book Concern, 1941), 202.

first black president of a college in America. The church was also developing schools in Africa as part of its missionary outreach. As one who could not go to a school as a child and who felt the daily limitations and humiliations associated with not being able to read, Sarah was now a part of an international organization that was building schools across her native South and abroad.

The AME emphasis on education occurred within the larger context on how best to educate blacks. While the classical education versus industrial education dilemma in black education has been largely associated with W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington's early twentieth century public debate on the matter, the AME Church had educated blacks since its founding and had internally debated various approaches to that education for more than half a century prior. But this particular question was less of a problem for the church. According to historian Lawrence Little, AME leaders were malleable and:

internalized and practically applied whatever philosophy or philosophies seemed to best address the evolving negative racial attitudes that justified the adverse treatment of people of color...They built an institution that combined religious and political messages with pragmatic approaches to achieving first-class citizenship. This African American pragmatism aided by the duality of African American identity—the 'twoness' that Du Bois examined—allowed AME leaders to absorb and synthesize the philosophies of Washington, Du Bois, and others and espouse one or the other or all to varying degree depending upon any number of factors or situations.⁷⁶

Madam Walker would later demonstrate a similar pragmatism in her embrace of both philosophies when she actively courted Booker T. Washington's favor and supported his institution through scholarships while simultaneously she exposed herself

⁷⁶ Lawrence S. Little, *Disciples of Liberty: The African Methodist Episcopal Church in the Age of Imperialism, 1884-1916* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2000), 15.

to the arts, literature, and culture, and infused her own industrial-oriented beauty culture training curriculum with characteristics of liberal education (See Chapter Two).

In addition to its educational pursuits, the AME Church also had international interests from its inception. Bishopric visits to Africa began four years after the church was founded and by 1830 two churches were started in Haiti.⁷⁷ These activities were proceeded by many more in countries like Canada, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and across the Caribbean. However, historian Lawrence Little has shown how the AME Church's overseas work was not limited to the traditional kinds of missionary outreach and proselytizing done by most white Christian denominations. He described the AME overseas work as "a foreign agenda that sought a global application of American liberty by globalizing issues of oppression and identifying with oppressed people around the world, regardless of race."⁷⁸ According to Little, this agenda was steeped in a plural nationalist political ideology which focused on racial awareness and pride along with collaboration and cohesion to fight oppression in the global context. Little found evidence of this approach in church records and publications which documented detailed engagement and debates over international social and political issues in countries like Spain, Russia, Philippines, Ireland, France, Japan, and across Africa. Sarah may have taken note of the church's activities in Africa, more broadly, and South Africa, more specifically, which had taken on increasing importance during her first decade of membership and had received widespread attention.

⁷⁷ Harry V. Richardson, *Dark Salvation: The Story of Methodism as It Developed among Blacks in America* (Garden City, NY: Anchor-Press/Double Day, 1976), 89.

⁷⁸ Lawrence S. Little, *Disciples of Liberty: The African Methodist Episcopal Church in the Age of Imperialism, 1884-1916* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2000), xi-xii.

Historian James Campbell described the AME Church as a transatlantic institution that was consumed with Africa from its inception. This African dominance in the conscience of the AME Church was due, according to Campbell, to the “complex human and imaginative traffic that binds African and African American experience” and identities.⁷⁹ Such bonds were clearly evident between the AME Church and South Africa. In 1896, the Ethiopian Church of Pretoria, South Africa, was accepted into the AME Church. Four years earlier, the founders of the Ethiopian Church had split with the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society in much the same way that Richard Allen and the black members of St. George’s had done more than a century earlier. Within a few years, Wilberforce Institute, an AME-sponsored industrial and teacher-training school, was created in the northern Transvaal of South Africa. It was established by South African graduates of the AME Church’s Wilberforce University in Ohio, including a woman named Charlotte Maxeke, who was taught and mentored by a young Wilberforce instructor named W.E.B. Du Bois. A second Wilberforce Institute was created in 1906 south of Johannesburg, South Africa. These became the focal points of the AME Church’s educational efforts in Africa. By 1910, the AME Church established other congregations and missions across the country to the point where tens of thousands of South Africans were exposed to its message and it became the dominant black denominational presence in the country and on the continent.⁸⁰ These developments were widely reported in AME publications and frequently announced by bishops and ministers travelling around the AME circuit delivering sermons. The AME Church’s track record

⁷⁹ James T. Campbell, *Songs of Zion: The African Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States and South Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), viii.

⁸⁰ James T. Campbell, *Songs of Zion: The African Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States and South Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), viii.

in South Africa, which began just after Sarah joined the church in the early 1890s and reached significant heights after Madam Walker's company became well established in the 1910s, may explain Madam Walker's 1912 philanthropic proposal to start an industrial school in South Africa (see Chapter Three).

Just as education and international missions were important to the AME Church from its founding, charitable giving was emphasized from the beginning as well. The AME Church believed that giving to the poor was so characteristic of Jesus Christ that charity should be equally normative for those who followed him. Church founder, Allen, wrote of Christian charity that it:

is pure and disinterested, remote from all hopes or views of worldly return or recompence from the persons we relieve. We are to do good and lend, hoping for nothing again. In its extent it is unlimited and universal...[It] takes in all mankind, strangers as well as relations or acquaintances, enemies as well as friends, the evil and unthankful, as well as the good and grateful. It has no other measure than the love of God to us, who gave his only begotten Son, and the love of our Saviour, who laid down his life for us, even whilst we were his enemies. It reaches not only to the good of the soul, but also to such assistance as may be necessary for the supply of the bodily wants of our fellow creatures.⁸¹

Current conceptions of philanthropy assume great distance between the giver and the receiver.⁸² However, the AME Church made no such distinction based on the writings of its founder. Allen had situated friends and family alongside strangers and, even enemies as objects of charity; thus, he made charity comprehensive and inclusive without stipulation. For Allen, such giving was all the same because if one could not act with mercy, compassion, or charity toward family members, upon what basis could one act toward strangers in the same way?

⁸¹ Richard Allen, *The Life Experience and Gospel Labours of the Rt. Reverend Richard Allen*, 50-51 (1833) accessed December 14, 2013, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/allen/allen.html>.

⁸² Robert Payton and Michael Moody, *Understanding Philanthropy: Its Meaning and Mission* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008).

Allen's phrase "unlimited and universal" was instructive because clearly material resources were neither copious nor common during his life time. This directive was not only about the material or personal resources extended to help others. The money, time, or hospitality given were not primary. The main focus in this prescription was the willingness to follow the example of Christ to love others through giving. Allen presented God as charitable for having given his only son, Jesus Christ, as a gift for the salvation of humanity. In turn, Christ gave his life to secure that salvation. In this Christian tradition, both God the Father and God the Son had made their gifts out of love. Consequently, Allen believed that AME Church members should demonstrate love and generosity through giving, too. To that end, Christ's followers were to use whatever means at their disposal to exhibit his love through their giving. This expectation included financial support of the church as noted by AME Church author Smith who wrote that the AME Church expected its members to "contribute their earthly substance, according to their ability for the support of the gospel, church, poor, and the various benevolent enterprises of the church."⁸³ It also included giving to promote the uplift of the race. Sarah, and later Madam Walker, gave in ways that agreed with the AME Church's teachings on Christian charity. Walker told newspapers about the church's influence upon her giving. In 1912, the *Indianapolis Freeman* commented that Walker "speaks of giving as a joy—a result of a Christian duty, as well as an inborn inclination. She holds the belief that the Lord prospers her because of her giving."⁸⁴ In 1914, she was described in the paper as possessing "the gift and spirit for the charity work. She takes great stock in the theory

⁸³ James H. Smith, *Vital Facts Concerning the African Methodist Episcopal Church: Its Origins, Doctrines, Government, Usages, Polity Progress* (Philadelphia, PA: AME Book Concern, 1941), 58.

⁸⁴ "America's Foremost Colored Woman," *Indianapolis Freeman*, December 28, 1912, p. 16.

that the Lord loves a cheerful giver. She gives bountifully and cheerfully.”⁸⁵ Walker felt compelled to give and enjoyed being generous toward people known and unknown, and by using diverse forms of gifts to be of assistance.

Of all the aspects of life in the AME Church that Sarah was exposed to, the most far-reaching in influence was undoubtedly the example of women lay leaders in the church whom she came to know through St. Paul’s Mite Missionary Society. Historian Bettye Collier-Thomas presented much of the history of AME missionary societies.⁸⁶ According to Collier-Thomas, the AME Women’s Parent Mite Missionary Society (WPMMS) was formally organized at the denominational level in 1874 out of the preexisting work of Dorcas Societies and women’s groups that conducted charity relief work for the poor. Church law dictated that only male ministers could initiate local mite missionary societies, and many men opposed their creation over fears of competition from women. In spite of this opposition, members of the all-female WPMMS board regularly advocated for autonomy within this environment. By 1894, all AME district conferences and regions had their own missionary societies, which were simply called Mite Missionary Societies, a name which referred to the ways in which the aggregate of women’s mites—that is, their small gifts of money—created important funding streams for missions activity.⁸⁷

As a national body, WPMMS effectively became the AME Church’s missionary department because the latter’s existing missionary groups were dormant. WPMMS was committed to evangelism around the world, and, through partnership and collaboration

⁸⁵ “The Life Work of Mme. C.J. Walker,” *Indianapolis Freeman*, December 26, 1914, p 1.

⁸⁶ Bettye Collier-Thomas, *Jesus, Jobs, and Justice: African American Women and Religion* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010).

⁸⁷ James T. Campbell, *Songs of Zion: The African Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States and South Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 93.

with other AME home and foreign missionary groups, to send a missionary to Haiti, which eventually happened in 1877. At the national level, WPMMS was vying for leadership of the denomination's home and foreign missionary activities, while at the local level, mite missionary societies, like the one that helped Sarah at St. Paul's in St. Louis, raised money for home and foreign missions activities, provided support for local churches, and aided ministers' and their families. The term "home missions" generally meant activities within the United States, and included visiting sick and incarcerated individuals, and giving food, clothing, and other assistance to the local poor. As previously mentioned, in the case of St. Paul's Mite Missionary Society much of its local missions work in the 1870s and 1880s was focused on caring for the black migrants arriving in the city of St. Louis. This combination of home and foreign missions activity "often fused evangelism with political and social reform" and extended throughout local black American communities and overseas to Haiti, Africa, the Dominican Republic, Canada, and South Africa.⁸⁸ In total, Collier-Thomas estimated that there were over 30,000 black women organized into church-sponsored missionary auxiliaries around the turn of the century and that that number grew to over half a million by the middle of the twentieth century.⁸⁹

According to religious studies scholar Jualynne Dodson, the AME Church's 1816 founding "had no official place for women" even though women were present from the very beginning, including being with Allen and Jones when they left St. George's Church in protest over discriminatory worship practices, and establishing the first AME women's

⁸⁸ Bettye Collier-Thomas, *Jesus, Jobs, and Justice: African American Women and Religion* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), 195, 189.

⁸⁹ Bettye Collier-Thomas, *Jesus, Jobs, and Justice: African American Women and Religion* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), 195, 189, 202.

organization, Daughters of Conference, that same founding year.⁹⁰ Dodson argued that participation in women's groups within the AME Church enabled women to acquire three important sources of power—membership, organization, and resources—through which to challenge male dominance without destroying the denomination and while helping black communities around the world. While black women had to contend with racism and sexism from whites in society, they also battled with sexism from black men and black institutions. Within the AME denomination, this sexism took the form of what Bettye Collier-Thomas called “hegemonic masculinity,” a force which relegated black women to auxiliaries in order to maintain control over their actions and funding.⁹¹ However, such auxiliaries were catalytic in developing black women's autonomy.

Women's missionary societies and conventions—in both black and white denominations—provided the necessary infrastructure for women to launch national efforts to promote and advocate for their rights. In the AME Church, women obtained political and civic skills and the social capital necessary to create national networks and organizations to reform society.⁹² These auxiliary groups also served as mechanisms for social discourse, socialization, and education as AME women discussed important issues and shared information; learned about daily church operations; held offices; and served as teachers, exhorters, evangelists, class leaders, and even preachers.⁹³ Dodson wrote, “What they learned about customs, norms, and procedures associated with keeping a

⁹⁰ Jualynne Dodson, *Engendering Church: Women, Power and the AME Church* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002), 2.

⁹¹ Bettye Collier-Thomas, *Jesus, Jobs, and Justice: African American Women and Religion* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), 142.

⁹² Bettye Collier-Thomas, *Jesus, Jobs, and Justice: African American Women and Religion* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), 120-121.

⁹³ Jualynne E. Dodson, *Engendering Church: Women, Power, and the AME Church* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002), 50.

local congregation viable was important for strengthening their gender organizations.”⁹⁴ Further, according to Dodson, participation enabled black women to develop both the material resources—real estate, labor, and finances—and the nonmaterial resources—denominational knowledge, formal education, community leadership, service experience, reputational credibility, and spiritual credibility—they used to advocate for their rights within the denomination. Consequently, at the start of the twentieth century, the AME Church, which had been founded without any provisions for women, had three denominational positions specifically for women and two autonomous women’s missionary societies.⁹⁵

AME women’s advocacy occurred outside of the denomination as well. AME women used their societies to engage with national networks, such as the National Association of Colored Women (NACW), that were protesting racism and sexism around the country. These relationships were clearly evidenced by the NACW affiliation of many of the women Sarah interacted with through St. Paul’s, such as Lavinia Carter, board member of the St. Louis Colored Orphans’ Home, and Maria Harrison, who was Sarah’s neighbor at one point.⁹⁶ In 1904, the World’s Fair Exposition was held in St. Louis over the course of several months. Controversy soon arose over the representation of African Americans in the exhibition as well as their access to activities. But the event also brought the NACW to town for its fourth biennial meeting that was hosted at Sarah’s church, St. Paul’s AME. Two hundred NACW delegates represented the organization’s

⁹⁴ Jualynne E. Dodson, *Engendering Church: Women, Power, and the AME Church* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002), 54.

⁹⁵ Jualynne E. Dodson, *Engendering Church: Women, Power, and the AME Church* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002), 80.

⁹⁶ A’Lelia Bundles, *On Her Own Ground: The Life and Times of Madam C.J. Walker* (New York: Washington Square Books, 2001), 54.

15,000 female members at the event. Black women with national reputations, such as Hallie Quinn Brown and Margaret Murray (Mrs. Booker T.) Washington, were also NACW members and participated in the biennial meeting. Since she was not a NACW member at this time because of class divisions among African Americans, it is unlikely that Sarah would have been involved with any meeting-related activities, but she certainly would have known about them and learned more about NACW's activities in founding orphanages, retirement homes, kindergartens, tuberculosis camps, and in resisting alcoholism and prostitution. In witness to its power to impact the world, Sarah would have certainly heard about NACW's protest of the World's Fair for its denial of employment opportunities for some of its members as well as its valiant fight against lynching.⁹⁷

By observing, interacting with, and being mentored by the women in St. Paul's Mite Missionary Society, with their connections to organizations like the St. Louis Colored Orphans' Home and NACW, Sarah experienced women who, according to Bettye Collier-Thomas, "embraced a commitment to religion and racial uplift, by combining evangelism with their reform efforts and making them the central elements of their activism."⁹⁸ This religiously-inspired self-help ethic and concomitant local and national infrastructure enabled black women's philanthropic action across the country. Sarah found herself right in the middle of this fervent activity and had to have been significantly influenced by it. Later, her efforts would greatly resemble some of the structures and practices known to have been developed and nurtured by black clubwomen

⁹⁷ For discussion of the 1904 World's Fair Exhibition, see A'Lelia Bundles, *On Her Own Ground: The Life and Times of Madam C.J. Walker* (New York: Washington Square Books, 2001), 70-75.

⁹⁸ Bettye Collier-Thomas, *Jesus, Jobs, and Justice: African American Women and Religion* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), 189.

and churchwomen, in general, and the women of the AME church and NACW, in particular. Sarah observed these women who were not only performing good works in their community, but who were also challenging the strictures of race in society and gender in their own church. Sarah's exposure to and deep engagement with the AME Church broadly gave her examples of language, leadership, structure, organization, and process that would become critical to her business empire and evolving practice of philanthropy more than a decade later.

To be sure, the AME Church, like many churches, was never free from blemish. Historians have documented the AME Church's paternalistic and imperialistic motivations overseas, its condescending views of southern freed people following Emancipation, its subordinate treatment of women, and the elitism and cultural arrogance of the denomination's middle-class membership with respect to the "black masses."⁹⁹ But on the whole, through the AME Church, Sarah, and later Madam Walker, was exposed to an ambitious, visionary, action-oriented institution that was created, funded, and managed by blacks during a time when American society on the whole made little room for them and regularly erected barriers that unnecessarily impeded and complicated daily living.

⁹⁹ See Julius H. Bailey, *Around the Family Altar: Domesticity in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, 1865-1900* (Tallahassee: University Press of Florida, 2005); Julius H. Bailey, *Race Patriotism: Protest and Print Culture in the AME Church* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2012); James T. Campbell, *Songs of Zion: The African Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States and South Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Harry V. Richardson, *Dark Salvation: The Story of Methodism as It Developed among Blacks in America* (Garden City, NY: Anchor-Press/Double Day, 1976); Lawrence S. Little, *Disciples of Liberty: The African Methodist Episcopal Church in the Age of Imperialism, 1884-1916* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2000); and Clarence Walker, *A Rock in a Weary Land: The African Methodist Episcopal Church during the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982).

Making Madam Walker, 1905-1919

As previously mentioned, the first five years of the new century were filled with many pressures for Sarah, including sending her child away to school, grieving the deaths of her brothers, dealing with separation from her second husband, and working as a washerwoman while attending night school. She also began working for a black woman from Illinois named Annie Turnbo (Annie Malone), who owned the Pope-Turnbo Company (Poro) in St. Louis which sold hair treatment products. Sarah's hair had begun to thin and fall out. Due to the extant state of hygiene and medicine, hair loss was common in response to sickness, scalp disease, low-protein diets, poor hair treatments, and inadequate washing.¹⁰⁰ The stress and conditions of urban life were taking their toll upon Sarah, but the experience also led to an opportunity.

In a newspaper interview in 1917, Walker described the process by which she developed the formula for her hair care products. She asserted that while experiencing this severe hair loss, she prayed for Heavenly guidance and her prayer was answered: "For one night I had a dream, and in that dream a big black man appeared to me and told me what to mix for my hair. Some of the remedy was from Africa, but I sent for it, mixed it, put it on my scalp and in a few weeks my hair was coming in faster than it had ever fallen out. I tried it on my friends; it helped them. I made up my mind I would begin to sell it."¹⁰¹ In an analysis of this statement, Bundles noted how such a story positioned Sarah as a healer with a mystical connection to God and the Motherland continent of Africa; thus, enhancing her marketability since it was not uncommon for black hair products to invoke connections to Africa. This moment was clearly a turning point in

¹⁰⁰ A'Lelia Bundles, *On Her Own Ground: The Life and Times of Madam C.J. Walker* (New York: Washington Square Books, 2001), 59.

¹⁰¹ "Queen of Gotham's Colored 400," *Literary Digest* 55 (October 13, 1917): 75-76.

Sarah's life, as Madam Walker recounted the same dream time and time again through various speeches around the country. Undoubtedly delivered with dramatic flair, the story of this dream served as a point of separation and transition, a dividing line between Sarah Breedlove's humble beginnings and continuous struggle and the emergence of Madam C.J. Walker. The dream helped to recast Sarah's identity. No longer just a lowly washerwoman, Sarah was now a divinely inspired woman of God who was given specific instructions on how to produce a product that would not only change her life, but put her in a position to change the lives of others through her gifts of dignified employment, enhanced self-esteem and personal pride of appearance, and philanthropy.

In 1905, Sarah had left St. Louis for Denver, Colorado.¹⁰² While Sarah's exact employment during this time is unknown, she reportedly sold Pope-Turnbo products and worked as a cook to pay for her expenses, while she developed her own products. Sarah canvassed neighborhoods for her own customers instead of those for Pope-Turnbo. This period would be a cause of contention between Madam Walker and Annie Turnbo (Malone) that later resulted in a sustained rivalry over the origins and quality of their products and a fierce battle in the marketplace for market share and exposure.¹⁰³

In Denver, Sarah joined the Shorter Chapel AME Church where her sister-in-law, Lucy, was a member. She also joined the church's Mite Missionary Society and the Columbine Chapter of the Court of Calanthe. C.J. joined Sarah by year's end and they lived in a thriving black neighborhood which formed a strong black business district comprised of barber shops, fraternal halls, shoe repair shops, recreation outlets, churches,

¹⁰² "Foremost among the few Women," ca. 1919, Box 3, Folder 1, Madam C.J. Walker Papers, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis, Indiana.

¹⁰³ "Queen of Gotham's Colored 400," *Literary Digest* 55 (October 13, 1917): 75-76; for discussion of Walker's relationship with Malone, see A'Lelia Bundles, *On Her Own Ground: The Life and Times of Madam C.J. Walker* (New York: Washington Square Press, 2001), 64-68, 81-82.

funeral homes, medical and dental offices. C.J. followed Sarah to Denver and the two married on January 4, 1906.¹⁰⁴

It was during this time that Sarah began using the moniker Mrs. C.J. Walker in newspaper advertisements for her hair products. Simultaneously, C.J.'s penchant for sales and marketing began to show as he staged numerous events to draw attention to the products. He sold tickets to these events along with raffle promotions. "The Walker husband-and-wife partnership appeared to be flourishing with one's individual pursuits reinforcing the other's," wrote Walker biographer A'Lelia Bundles.¹⁰⁵

The year 1906 was a critical one for Sarah as she constantly promoted her services, and business began to dramatically increase. For six months, she advertised in local papers on a weekly basis, even using communication from Annie Turnbo (Malone) to warn her customers not to utilize other products which did not have the same quality ingredients or results. But by the end of the summer, the "Mrs. C.J. Walker" promoted in weekly ads suddenly became "Madam C.J. Walker," a title commonly used by hairdressers and other women working in fashion and beauty.¹⁰⁶ She began travelling around Colorado promoting Madam Walker's Wonderful Hair Grower. Not only was she selling products, but she was also training women through classes on how to grow their own hair. She reportedly instructed groups as large as 45 at a time. Walker charged a modest fee for her class. Her daughter Lelia joined her and helped to manage a new shop they opened together in Denver.

¹⁰⁴ A'Lelia Bundles, *On Her Own Ground: The Life and Times of Madam C.J. Walker* (New York: Washington Square Press, 2001), 83-84.

¹⁰⁵ A'Lelia Bundles, *On Her Own Ground: The Life and Times of Madam C.J. Walker* (New York: Washington Square Press, 2001), 86.

¹⁰⁶ A'Lelia Bundles, *On Her Own Ground: The Life and Times of Madam C.J. Walker* (New York: Washington Square Press, 2001), 88.

Walker's business was very successful and Annie Turnbo (Malone) took notice, placing ads that challenged Walker's assertions about her products and noting that she had trained Walker. Turnbo (Malone) sent an agent to Denver to set up shop just a few blocks away from Walker, and their rivalry ensued. After approximately two to three years, Madam Walker left Denver, in search of larger markets of black customers ready for her products. Travelling had caused Walker to realize the potential in southern and northern cities with developing black populations. Within two years, Madam Walker's income went from \$300 per year to \$3,652 per year and her new life was well underway.¹⁰⁷ The orphaned-widowed-migrating-washerwoman mother, who was socialized and inspired by black philanthropic institutions and individuals, had created and activated a new vision for her life and stepped onto a new trajectory of triumph that would reverberate across time leaving a legacy for generations.

Conclusion

The moral imagination enables an individual to see her world as it exists, with all its troubles, injustices, beauty, and potential, and envision new realities and possibilities with less human suffering and greater human thriving. The moral imagination then calls that individual to action in order to bring that newly envisioned future into existence. Shaped by the historical, social, political, and cultural contexts of an individual's existence, the moral imagination emerges over time and through experiences with the harsh, the absurd, and the beautiful. If philanthropy is the main conduit through which an

¹⁰⁷ A'Lelia Bundles, *On Her Own Ground: The Life and Times of Madam C.J. Walker* (New York: Washington Square Press, 2001), 92.

individual actualizes her moral imagination—as Payton and Moody argued¹⁰⁸—then examining an individual’s moral imagination becomes important for understanding the motivations for and goals of her philanthropy.

Sarah Breedlove gave birth to Madam C.J. Walker out of a moral imagination shaped by the harsh racialized and gendered realities of her circumstances, and the hopeful racialized and gendered supports of those around her. As someone born at the developing dawn of Reconstruction in the Deep South, but who came of age during its disappointing dusk as it was replaced by Jim Crow, Sarah was a long-suffering washerwoman who, instinctively, wanted something better for herself and her daughter. As an orphan, Sarah had not had the benefit of parental influence to inculcate philanthropic values. Consequently, she was socialized by black civil society institutions and networks created, funded, operated, and led by black women and black men focused on uplifting their race. They filled that parental void and helped Sarah do the same for her daughter, Lelia. From them and their example, Sarah acquired the wherewithal to not only dream, but to actualize that dream so that it became not only about a better way for her and Lelia, but also for blacks and oppressed people around the world.

The St. Paul AME Church stood at the heart of these nurturing and inspiring black institutions and networks. For Sarah, the AME Church was a refuge from life as a single mother struggling to make it on a washerwoman’s income. The AME Church represented a place of connection and caring as Sarah was embraced and mentored by the women of the church and the community, and introduced to much needed social services. The AME Church not only served as a source of immediate connection and concern, it also led

¹⁰⁸ Robert Payton and Michael Moody, *Understanding Philanthropy: Its Meaning and Mission* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 22.

Sarah to join organizations—such as the Court of Calanthe and the Mite Missionary Society—in which her churchwomen mentors were leaders. Through such organizations, her social sphere expanded and she began to learn more about the social and political issues affecting black life and the strategies of racial uplift and self-help as means to their amelioration. The AME Church itself had historically held a very strong activist view of itself as not only being called to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but to live out and apply that gospel by engaging the causes and concerns of blacks and oppressed people around the world. The web of institutions and networks anchored by the AME Church provided the foundational constructs of Sarah Breedlove’s moral imagination, and these same elements were evident in Madam C.J. Walker, who stood as the physical embodiment of the moral imagination of Sarah Breedlove.

In 1912, Walker told the *Indianapolis Freeman* about the importance of these early years and experiences as it reported, “The habit of giving long since became a part of her. From her youth up she has felt to give—the widow’s mite, at least, when she could do no more. She speaks of giving as a joy—a result of a Christian duty, as well as an inborn inclination. She holds the belief that the Lord prospers her because of her giving.”¹⁰⁹ Walker felt a responsibility to God and a passion for her people that led her to be generous in spirit and deeds, and the people and institutions of St. Louis helped inculcate such values into her.

Black churches and other black institutional networks, such as the Court of Calanthe and NACW, would become strategic partners and resources in the commercial and philanthropic operations of Walker’s company. She frequently utilized churches as locations for hosting promotional meetings to demonstrate the effectiveness of her

¹⁰⁹ “America’s Foremost Colored Woman,” *Indianapolis Freeman*, December 28, 1912, p. 16.

products and as bases for recruitment of sales agents. Always in search of new opportunities and expanding markets, Madam Walker moved her residency every few years. But no matter where she moved, she remained connected to AME churches, such as the Shorter Chapel AME Church in Denver and the Bethel AME Church in Indianapolis, IN. These were her spiritual anchors, sacred places of worship and renewal, and her nurturing networks, through which she would eventually meet the likes of Mary McLeod Bethune, Ida B. Wells, and other racewomen who would expand her influence and opportunity to help the race.

Madam Walker's moral imagination, which was grounded in the experiences of Sarah Breedlove, had numerous outlets for expression given Walker's gradual accumulation of resources. No longer consumed with the struggles of a washerwoman, Madam C.J. Walker had answers to those struggles. While she was still black, female, and subject to the larger structures of Jim Crow America, Walker's growing wealth and potential provided just enough insulation and options to enable her to dream even bigger dreams than Sarah had. Madam Walker's dreams included building an international company, employing thousands of black women, and engaging a type of philanthropic giving that called upon every available resource at her disposal to uplift the race and make life better for others.

CHAPTER TWO:
THE MADAM C.J. WALKER MANUFACTURING COMPANY:
A COMMERCIAL AND PHILANTHROPIC ENTERPRISE

“I am in the business world, not for myself alone,
but to do all the good I can for the uplift of my race.”
—Madam Walker (1912)¹

Just as Madam Walker was the physical embodiment of Sarah Breedlove’s moral imagination, the Madam C.J. Walker Manufacturing Company of Indiana (MCJWMC) was the institutional manifestation of the commitments and dreams that formed Sarah’s and, later, Madam Walker’s visions of the good life and the good society. Scholars have rightly taken to Walker as an early-twentieth-century example of a prominent and successful American female, African American, *and* African American female entrepreneur. Her story has been used in a variety of ways to inform the historiography of many fields.² In this process, scholars have acknowledged Walker’s facility in merging individual and collective interests with corporate and community goals.³ In such analyses, however, the MCJWMC has typically been in the background, providing context for investigation, but rarely the main subject of inquiry. While investigations of

¹ Louis Harlan and Raymond Smock, eds., *The Booker T. Washington Papers*, Vol. 11: 1911-12 (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 456.

² See Introduction for review of historiography on Walker.

³ See Leroy Davis, “Madam C.J. Walker: A Woman of Her Time,” in *The African Experience in Community Development: The Continuing Struggle in Africa and in the Americas* vol. 2, eds. Edward W. Crosby, Leroy Davis, and Anne Adams Graves (Needham Heights, MA: Advocate Publishing Group, 1980), 37-60. Davis viewed Walker as combining racial cooperation with racial solidarity as black entrepreneurs and black consumers engaged in mutually beneficial exchanges that sustained commercial enterprises and yielded economic and philanthropic value to the community. See also Kate Dossett, *Bridging Race Divides: Black Nationalism, Feminism, and Integration in the United States, 1896-1935* (Orlando: University Press of Florida, 2008). Dossett echoed Kathy Peiss’s earlier use of “charismatic capitalism” to view Walker as both business woman and race woman. See Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America’s Beauty Culture* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998). See also Erin Chapman, *Prove It on Me: New Negroes, Sex, and Popular Culture in the 1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). Chapman presented Walker’s ethos of profits and service to the race in relation to the larger New Negro Progressive framework of “race motherhood.”

Walker's newspaper advertising strategy and national networks of beauty schools and agent clubs have yielded great insights into aspects of her company's operations, they largely remain separate from each other and have yet to present a comprehensive view of the company and its role as an instrument of Walker's commercial and philanthropic ethos.

While scholars have tended to treat these elements of Walker's enterprise separately, there is good historical reason not to do so. The idea of American society being comprised of three separate sectors—the market, the government, and the voluntary sphere—was largely a late-twentieth-century construction that gathered momentum following the federal Filer Commission's delineation of nonprofit action as being distinctive from the other two in the 1970s.⁴ Historically, however, rather than being distinct unto themselves, the relations between and activities of these three areas have been characterized by overlap, intersections and interrelationships that have resulted in a blurring of the lines between them from the earliest days of the country.⁵ In the African American historical experience, the notion of three separate sectors has not always worked well due to the pervasiveness of oppression and the three sectors' collusion in that oppression. During Walker's lifetime, African Americans were either locked out of the market or locked into its most menial and least paying jobs; their rights were denied, acknowledged, and denied again by the government sector, which had previously enslaved them; and their social needs were largely neglected and ignored by

⁴ Peter Dobkin Hall, "A Historical Overview of Philanthropy, Voluntary Associations, and Nonprofit Organizations in the United States, 1600-2000," in *The Nonprofit Sector: A Research Handbook 2nd ed.*, eds. Walter W. Powell and Richard Steinberg (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 55. For a discussion of the evolution of the names and definitions of the nonprofit sector, see Peter Frumpkin, *On Being Nonprofit: A Conceptual and Policy Primer* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 10-16.

⁵ Kathleen McCarthy, *American Creed: Philanthropy and the Rise of Civil Society 1700-1865* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 4, 5.

the agencies and organizations that comprised social services. African Americans did not have the luxury of thinking in such a compartmentalized manner. They needed to be creative and adaptive which required thinking across boundaries and using any available means to meet their own needs and work for societal change. The practice of self-help evolved to compensate for this unreliability, which meant that black institutions—whether a school, business, fraternal lodge, church, or service agency in name—would have to serve multiple purposes in practice.

And so, if Madam Walker the entrepreneur was also a “race woman,” meaning a black woman dedicated to serving the African American struggle for liberation, how did the structure and operations of her company enable and facilitate both roles, and advance an agenda that was simultaneously commercial and philanthropic? How was business conducted on a daily basis in order to actualize this dual framework? In order to pursue these questions, this chapter will analyze the MCJWMC while it was under the direct control of Walker as well as during the years immediately following her death as the idea of Walker was used to reinforce the company’s goals and operating culture.⁶

Asking these particular questions brings the MCJWMC out of the background and into the foreground, placing its internal dynamics on display for insights on how a company became a “race company,”⁷ one owned and operated by blacks and that simultaneously served commercial goals and pursued philanthropic values—both in service to the race. These dynamics involved particular recruitment practices and employment opportunities offered by the company which considered black women’s

⁶ In the case of the Walker Beauty Schools, analysis will extend out three decades after Walker’s death.

⁷ Freeman B. Ransom, Walker’s general counsel, called the business a “race company.” See “Madam C.J. Walker, Black Business Woman” by A’Lelia Bundles, Box 12, Folder 19, Madam C.J. Walker Papers, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis, Indiana (hereafter cited as MCJWP).

status in the labor market, educational opportunities provided through Lelia College and a national network of Walker beauty training schools, and associationalism and activism nurtured through Walker's national organization of agents. These activities were focused around Walker's selection of, trust in, and collaboration with Freeman B. Ransom, her general manager and legal counsel. After discussing the company's recruitment and employment practices, beauty schools, and organization of agents, this chapter will investigate the relationship between Walker and Ransom, which has not been examined in depth before, and the role of their partnership in operating the company for both commercial gain and philanthropic uplift. However, before examining these dynamics, it is important to define the historical basis for viewing the MCJWMC as a commercial and philanthropic institution as well as the labor status of black women in the American marketplace.

Viewing the Walker Company

At least three features of the African American historical experience help to explain the MCJWMC as a commercial and philanthropic institution. First, black institutions have historically been characterized by their versatility and multipurpose functions. Second, black social and philanthropic institutions have historically placed significant emphasis on personal health and hygiene in their racial uplift work. Third, education has been central in the political struggle for African American liberation. Together, these three features contextualize the dual-natured work of the MCJWC.

The ideology of self-help as practiced by African Americans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries required deployment of any and all available means to uplift

the race out of its destitute condition, whether those means were private—meaning individual action conducted interpersonally to help others, and collective action through privately-run or owned organizations and businesses—or public—meaning political action taken to use the law and make demands upon local, state, and federal governments for social change. This core requirement emerged from the sense that when almost everything had been taken away from African Americans (i.e., human rights; social, political, economic opportunities, etc.), anything else they possessed, slowly built, or acquired had to become a tool for recovering what was lost or some semblance thereof. Thus, activities and institutions in the white mainstream that traditionally had one primary purpose looked very different and assumed multiple roles and functions in the marginalized black experience. For instance, the Black Church has never been simply a religious institution. As a result of the broader condition of African Americans, the Black Church assumed social, cultural, economic, political, and educational roles and purposes along with its spiritual and religious characteristics.⁸ This versatile nature of black institutions was an adaptation for survival and it has been historically present in black entrepreneurship as well.

Historically, black business was not just about making money. Cheryl A. Smith, a scholar of black women’s entrepreneurship, has described it as “the creative management of available resources and the sale of goods and services for profit” that was grounded in “the legacy of entrepreneurship and community economic development formed by our

⁸ For more on the role of the Black Church, see: Marci Bounds Littlefield, “The Black Church and Community Development and Self-Help: The Next Phase of Social Equality,” *Western Journal of Black Studies*, 29, 4 (2005): 687-693; Milton C. Sernett, ed., *Afro-American Religious History: A Documentary Witness*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1985); C. Eric Lincoln, *The Negro Church in America / The Black Church Since Frazier* (New York: Schocken Books, 1974). The same can be said about other black institutions such as black fraternal organizations, which were not just about associationalism, but also engaged in business development, social service provision, education, and political and social activism.

African traditions and shaped in a new cultural reality in the diasporic tradition of black women.”⁹ In particular, Smith observed a dialectical relationship between black women entrepreneurs’ social activism and their businesses: “Activism was used to make money, and money was made to support activism and social service and advance the cause of full citizenship for all Black people.”¹⁰ Smith noted that black women entrepreneurs “sold their products, their work, and their services for profit and for the betterment of the lives of Black women and Black people in general.”¹¹ This conceptualization of black women’s entrepreneurship is critical for understanding the MCJWMC because it was not just preoccupied with profits. The MCJWMC aspired to provide avenues of opportunity on a large scale for black women who would develop financial autonomy and independence for themselves and their families, and serve their race along the way.

One manner in which black women, and men, sought to uplift the race was through improving personal health and hygiene in black communities. This focus was important to black philanthropic and social action in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The substantial rural poverty of black farmers in the South and the large concentrations of blacks in northern urban centers created by migration patterns frequently led to squalid living conditions that were compounded by the effects of racial discrimination (e.g., substandard housing, limited access to healthcare, hunger and inadequate nutrition, poor sanitation).¹² After observing black farming families with pig pens near water wells, dilapidated housing, and disheveled personal appearances, Booker

⁹ Cheryl A. Smith, *Market Women: Black Women Entrepreneurs: Past, Present, and Future* (Westport: Praeger, 2005), 44, 45.

¹⁰ Cheryl A. Smith, *Market Women: Black Women Entrepreneurs: Past, Present, and Future* (Westport: Praeger, 2005), 50.

¹¹ Cheryl A. Smith, *Market Women: Black Women Entrepreneurs: Past, Present, and Future* (Westport: Praeger, 2005), 45.

¹² Sandra Crouse Quinn and Stephen Thomas, “The National Negro Health Week, 1915-1951: A Descriptive Account,” *Minority Health Today* 2, 3 (March/April 2001): 44-49.

T. Washington had made health and hygiene an early emphasis of Tuskegee Institute's extension programming in Alabama's rural black communities. His efforts had begun in the 1890s and had culminated with his National Negro Health Week campaign that continued well after his death in 1915. In particular, his movable schools—which were initially horse-drawn covered wagons stocked with farming equipment and other instructional materials—were sent out among the black farmers to provide on-site instruction for improving their farming practices, personal hygiene, and sanitation regimes.¹³ The Tuskegee Women's Club, organized in 1895 by Margaret Murray (Mrs. Booker T.) Washington regularly sent members out into local homes to teach women housekeeping and child-rearing, and later operated a Sex Hygiene Committee to instruct women on the role of cleanliness and moral conduct in preventing venereal disease. In 1908, Lugenia Burns Hope, wife of Morehouse College President John Hope, founded the Neighborhood Union in Atlanta, Georgia, a social services organization whose array of programming included surveying disease and sanitation, and teaching black women hygienic practices related to bathing, caring for the sick, cleaning homes, and protecting well water.¹⁴

While black institutions acknowledged the role of racism in creating poor health and hygiene in black communities, many blacks—as a result of Victorian perspectives on moral conduct or emerging Progressive and scientific distinctions between the deserving

¹³ Roscoe C. Brown, "The National Negro Health Week Movement," *Journal of Negro Education* 6, 3 (July 1937): 553-564; Thomas Monroe Campbell, *The Movable School Goes to the Negro Farmer* (Tuskegee: Tuskegee Institute Press, 1936).

¹⁴ For a discussion of the Tuskegee Mother's Club and the Neighborhood Union see Cynthia Neverdon-Morton, *Afro-American Women of the South and the Advancement of the Race, 1895-1925* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989), 132-137, 145-163; Jacqueline Anne Rouse, *Lugenia Burns Hope, Black Southern Reformer* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004); Susan Smith, *Sick and Tired of Being Sick and Tired: Black Women's Health Activism in America, 1890-1950*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995).

and undeserving poor—also thought poor blacks contributed to such squalid conditions through their behavior. Middle-class black clubwomen—including those who were in the National Association of Colored Women—emphasized moral conduct, purity, hygiene, and home maintenance in their pursuit of Victorian models of womanhood through initiatives targeted at working-class, black female migrants gathering in urban ghettos. Such emphases on hygiene continued as black clubwomen’s programs expanded into social settlement houses, homes for the aged and orphans, and responses to tuberculosis outbreaks.¹⁵ The National Urban League (The League), founded in 1911, also emphasized hygiene, health, and personal appearance in its application of social science methods to black communities in northern cities. The League frequently conducted scientific surveys of black neighborhoods to assess housing and sanitation conditions and inform responsive strategies. In a local response to arriving black migrants, the Chicago Urban League distributed handbills which urged moral behavior, cleanliness, civility, and health during the organization’s first and second decades. Similarly, according to historian Touré Reed, the New York Urban League believed personal hygiene and grooming were important “cultural tools” that had to be taught to newly-arrived black migrants to help them adapt to the city. As a result, the organization distributed lists of “Do’s and Don’ts” to migrants which promoted hygienic practices. The organization believed that maintaining one’s personal appearance and constitution, and engaging in

¹⁵ For discussion of black clubwomen’s work in health and hygiene, see Dorothy Salem, *To Better Our World: Black Women in Organized Reform, 1890-1920* (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, 1990): 65-100; Susan Smith, *Sick and Tired of Being Sick and Tired: Black Women’s Health Activism in America, 1890-1950* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995); Cynthia Neverdon-Morton *Afro-American Women of the South and the Advancement of the Race, 1895-1925* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989); Floris Barnett Cash, *African American Women and Social Action: The Clubwomen and Volunteerism from Jim Crow to the New Deal, 1896-1936* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2001).

appropriate behaviors enhanced one's self esteem, reflected well upon the race, and positioned blacks for social acceptance by whites.¹⁶

As a result of these activities and many more, black clubwomen and black organizations, according to historian Adrienne Lash Jones, engaged in hygiene work that should be viewed as philanthropy because they sought to “build pride and self-esteem among the young and to model the social skills which they considered to be imperative for upward social and economic mobility.” Further, she argued that in a society dominated by Jim Crow and determined to assault black sensibilities and contain black aspirations, these efforts provided “a formula for maintaining dignity and self-confidence...however distorted their motivations and methods may seem today.”¹⁷ And so, within this context, Madam Walker's use of beauty culture to create economic opportunities for herself and black women by improving black women's personal hygiene assumed added meaning and function. It was not just meeting a need in the marketplace for a particular set of goods; it was enhancing black women's self-esteem and personal appearance and thereby fulfilling an important goal of black women's racial uplift and philanthropic programs.

Throughout history, African Americans have also pursued education as a prime aspiration. As a resource that had been both denied and pursued, education represented a linchpin for securing hope for individuals and freedom for the race. During slavery, the cultural and operating practices of southern plantations and the legal statutes of many southern states prohibited provision of even the bare rudiments of literacy for slaves, let

¹⁶ For discussion of the National Urban League's work in hygiene, see Touré F. Reed, *Not Alms but Opportunity: The Urban League and the Politics of Racial Uplift, 1910-1950* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 29.

¹⁷ Adrienne Lash Jones, “Philanthropy in the African American Experience,” in *Giving: Western Ideas of Philanthropy*, ed. J.B. Schneewind (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 164.

alone formal schooling. However, under secrecy and the constant threat of punishment, many slaves aggressively deployed numerous methods to develop their literacy.¹⁸

This impulse for learning only expanded following emancipation as African American efforts to establish free communities included special emphasis on the provision of education and the creation of schools. In his autobiographical reflections on his rise out of slavery, Booker T. Washington noted the newly freed slaves' fervor for literacy and education following emancipation:

...it was a whole race trying to go to school. Few were too young, and none too old, to make the attempt to learn. As fast as any kind of teachers could be secured, not only were day-schools filled, but night-schools as well. The great ambition of the older people was to try to learn to read the Bible before they died. With this end in view, men and women who were fifty or seventy-five years old would often be found in the night-school. Sunday-schools were formed soon after freedom, but the principal book studied in the Sunday-school was the spelling-book. Day-school, night-school, Sunday-school, were always crowded, and often many had to be turned away for want of room.¹⁹

While the demise of slavery and the rise of Reconstruction did away with laws against educating blacks, African Americans still had to engage a long-suffering struggle to assert their own freedom and control their own lives. According to educational historian James Anderson, an ideological system of second-class education for blacks emerged through the efforts of southern white-led governments and northern white industrial philanthropists who sought to maintain the status quo of black racial oppression.²⁰

¹⁸ For discussion of African Americans' efforts to educate themselves during and after slavery, see Heather Andrea Williams, *Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

¹⁹ Booker T. Washington. *Up from Slavery: An Autobiography*. Electronic edition (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 30, accessed May 31, 2014, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/washington/washing.html>. Booker T. Washington, *Up from Slavery* (New York: Doubleday Press, 1901), 30.

²⁰ This system of second-class education framed the well-known debates between Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois regarding the form and function of education for blacks in the early twentieth century, as well as Carter G. Woodson's famous formulation of the deliberate and calculated misuse of education as

In spite of such opposition, Anderson observed that blacks created a “unique system of public and private education” in the decades following emancipation because they “viewed literacy and formal education as means to liberation and freedom.”²¹

Historically, education has been both a principle object of and an instrument for engaging in black philanthropy. As an objective, education motivated the voluntary actions of both black individuals and social institutions.²² According to Emmett Carson, education served as a “special concern” of black philanthropic institutions, including churches, benevolent associations, women’s clubs, fraternal orders, and literary societies, which established various types of formal and informal educational programs and institutions to meet the needs of their communities.²³ In these ways, the administrative provision of education for the masses was a goal of black philanthropy. However, in the African American tradition of philanthropy, education itself was also an instrument for doing philanthropy and being philanthropic. The process of educating others was a melioristic act, one that supported participants in acquiring and creating new knowledge, information, and skills—philanthropic gifts²⁴—that dramatically changed their relationship to the broader world. While this view of education as philanthropy was not the exclusive domain of black philanthropy, it has been historically emphasized and

a form of social control of blacks. See Carter G. Woodson, *The Miseducation of the Negro* (Washington D.C.: Associated Publishers, 1933).

²¹ James Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 2, 17.

²² For discussion of how black individuals connected their philanthropy with educational pursuits see Marybeth Gasman and Katherine Sedgwick, *Uplifting a People: African American Philanthropy and Education* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005).

²³ Emmett Carson, *A Hand Up: Black Philanthropy and Self-Help in America* (Washington D.C.: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, 1993), 13.

²⁴ In viewing education as philanthropy, the teaching and learning transaction becomes a philanthropic exchange through which teachers and learners create and share knowledge, skills, and information that have the potential to be life-changing when applied in pursuit of personal, professional, or social goals. The knowledge, skills and information effectively become philanthropic gifts that promote the public good by supporting individual self-determination and enhancing civic life.

evident in its practice. When black clubwomen in the Progressive Era set up educational programs, they were not just providing education as an administrative goal, they were using education itself to change the minds and lives of African Americans through the teaching of literacy, child-rearing, hygiene, and other subjects they deemed to be important for freedom. When black teachers, who held positions of esteem in their communities because of the premium placed on education, worked in under-resourced and dilapidated Jim Crow public schools, they mentored their students and engaged in community work above and beyond the expectations of their paid positions because education itself was viewed as an important instrument for uplifting the race and required such commitment.²⁵ In these ways and more, educating others not only marked a significant aim of black philanthropy, it became a philanthropic act itself.

Taken together, the roles of social institutions, entrepreneurship, hygiene, and education in the African American historical experience provide important points of departure for understanding the MCJWMC as a simultaneously commercial and philanthropic institutional response to the socioeconomic needs of black women, specifically, and the black community, generally, within the larger context of a hostile society and inimical labor market conditions.

²⁵ For more on the community and philanthropic engagements of black teachers, see Adam Fairclough, *A Class of their Own: Black Teachers in the Segregated South* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2007); Vanessa Siddle-Walker, *Their Highest Potential: An African American School in the Segregated South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Sharon Harley, "Beyond the Classroom: The Organizational Lives of Black Female Teachers in the District of Columbia, 1890-1930," *Journal of Negro Education* 51, 3 (Summer 1982): 254-265.

Company Overview

The MCJWMC was incorporated in Indianapolis, Indiana, in September 1911. According to its articles of incorporation, its purpose was “to manufacture and sell a hair growing, beautifying and scalp disease-curing preparation and clean scalps with the same.”²⁶ The company had as its officers Madam Walker, her husband C.J., and her daughter Lelia. Madam Walker retained the services of Freeman B. Ransom, a black, newly minted attorney in Indianapolis, as legal counsel. Along with shampoo for hair cleansing, the company’s four earliest products included: Temple Grower, for developing growth along the hairline; Tetter Salve, for relieving itching and discomfort from scalp diseases such as eczema and tetter; Hair Grower, for strengthening and stimulating weak hair; and Glossine, for moisturizing and adding sheen to hair.²⁷

Madam Walker started her business activities during a time of growth in black business. In 1893, as Sarah had settled into St. Louis, Missouri, and dreamed of a better life for herself, there were 17,000 black-owned businesses in America. By 1903, that number had increased to 25,000 as Sarah had begun selling products for Annie Malone and would soon develop her own products to sell in Denver, Colorado. Ten years later, just two years after the incorporation of the MCJWMC, there were 40,000 black-owned businesses.²⁸

²⁶ Articles of Incorporation of the Madame C.J. Walker Manufacturing Company of Indiana, Box 7, Folder 1, Madam C.J. Walker Papers, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis, Indiana.

²⁷ Madam C.J. Walker Manufacturing Company, *The Madam C.J. Walker Beauty Manual: A Thorough Treatise Covering all Branches of Beauty Culture*. First Edition. (Indianapolis, Madam C.J. Walker Manufacturing Company, 1924): 212-214, Indianapolis Reading Room Collection, Indiana-Marion County Public Library, Indianapolis, Indiana; Over time, the product array included as many as sixteen different products.

²⁸ For statistics on black business ownership in late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Juliatt E.K. Walker, *The History of Black Business: Capitalism, Race, Entrepreneurship*, 2nd ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 272.

Ransom called the business a “race company”²⁹ because it was created, owned, and operated by African Americans for the benefit of the black community. As a race company, Walker’s business fit within the array of black institutions of all types working to uplift the race through specific self-help activities. These institutions—which were commercial, religious, educational, and fraternal—strived to meet the diverse needs of African Americans that were frequently ignored by the broader white society or resulted from its hostile policies, customs, and practices regarding race.

Black Women and the Labor Market

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the employment prospects for black women were bleak, even though their rates of participation in labor markets greatly exceeded those for white women. According to historian Sharon Harley, black men and women during this period were working-class “in terms of their objective position in the class structure and their lack of control over the means of production.” On average, approximately 30% of black women over the age of ten were earning wages in the labor markets of major urban centers.³⁰ According to economic historian Claudia Goldin, during and after Emancipation, the “legacy of slavery” forced blacks into the unskilled labor markets characterized by very low wages.³¹ She noted that black women’s rates of labor were three times higher than those for white women, and married black women’s labor participation was six times higher than that of married white women,

²⁹ “Madam C.J. Walker, Black Business Woman” by A’Lelia Bundles, Box 12, Folder 19, MCJWP.

³⁰ Sharon Harley, “When Your Work Is Not Who You Are: The Development of a Working-Class Consciousness among Afro-American Women,” in *Gender, Class, Race, and Reform in the Progressive Era*, ed. Noralee Frankel and Nancy Dye (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1991), 43-44.

³¹ Claudia Goldin, “Female Labor Force Participation: The Origin of Black and White Differences, 1870-1880,” *Journal of Economic History* 37, 1 (March, 1977): 92.

trends which continued well into the twentieth century. She attributed the large presence of black women in the labor market to the high unemployment and mortality rates for black men and low overall non-labor income for black households, conditions also linked to blacks' historical experience. As unskilled, low-wage earners, black women worked "more intensively" outside the home than white women and largely occupied domestic positions as cooks, servants, laundresses, and seamstresses. Goldin hypothesized that the experience and legacy of slavery had the additional effect of socializing black women to labor outside the home such that the late nineteenth-century stigmas against working for pay found among poor and working-class white women was much less prevalent among black women.³² Black women's employment outside the home was critical to the maintenance of black households, especially when the men in their households could not earn income sufficient for basic family needs.³³ Black women, having labored through slavery without pay, continued working after Emancipation and endured unfair, hostile work conditions and environments, even as their migration patterns had begun taking them out of the South.

According to Evelyn Nakano Glenn, black women were "an exclusive servant caste in the South," largely because of white women's refusal to work in positions

³² Despite the significant presence of black women in the labor market, there were still tensions surrounding the role of black women in the home, in general, as well as tensions between the roles of middle-class and working-class black women, in particular. For discussion, see Sharon Harley, "For the Good of Family and Race: Gender, Work and Domestic Roles in the Black Community, 1880-1930," *Signs*, 15, 2 (Winter 1990): 336-349; Julius H. Bailey, *Around the Family Altar: Domesticity in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, 1865-1900* (Tallahassee: University Press of Florida, 2005). Madam Walker was apparently largely unaffected by these tensions possibly due to her inability to trust or rely upon her husbands for subsistence since her first husband died shortly after their marriage, her second husband did not work, and her third husband was unfaithful.

³³ Sharon Harley, "When Your Work Is Not Who You Are: The Development of a Working-Class Consciousness among Afro-American Women," in *Gender, Class, Race, and Reform in the Progressive Era*, ed. Noralee Frankel and Nancy Dye (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1991), 43.

associated with them.³⁴ To further exacerbate relations between the two, white women frequently refused to work alongside black women, which led to segregated and unsanitary work conditions for black women within northern factories.³⁵ This refusal sometimes produced labor strikes by white women against their employers for hiring black women. When they were not fending off racialized attacks from white women, many black women (and the men in their lives) feared for their sexual violation and exploitation at the hands of white male employers. This anxiety was particularly prevalent among black women domestic workers. By having to work inside their employers' homes, black women were frequently subjected to the sexual advances of white men. This omnipresent threat caused many black women domestic workers to forego higher wages, in an effort to protect their bodies and dignity, by refusing employers' offers for them to live in the residences. Further, black women domestic workers were frequently lured into their positions by advertised promises of particular wage levels, only to be shorted on pay day as a matter of standard practice.³⁶

During the time of Walker's incorporation of her business, the racial dynamics of the labor market for black women were difficult. Black women were being paid as much as 60% less than white women, whose wages were already depressed because of their gender oppression.³⁷ Further, there was no reprieve from such challenges to be found in white-collar work. Between 1870 and 1920, black women were discriminated against and excluded from the emerging professional, clerical, managerial, and sales positions that

³⁴ Evelyn Nakano Glenn, "Racial Ethnic Women's Labor: The Intersection of Race, Class, and Gender Oppression," *Review of Radical Political Economics* 17, 3 (1985): 96.

³⁵ Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (New York: Bantam Books, 1984).

³⁶ Tera Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 106-107..

³⁷ Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (New York: Bantam Books, 1984), 144.

white women were entering.³⁸ Major trade unions also directly prohibited white and black women's membership.³⁹ Before Madam Walker and the other mesdames in black beauty culture, labor in the manufacturing sector was largely closed off to black women save for the menial positions associated with cleaning factories.⁴⁰ The MCJWMC's offer of employment was an oasis for black women in such a desolate economic landscape.

Sociologist Robert Boyd has described the black beauty culture industry in the early twentieth century as an "ethnic niche economy" that enabled black women to navigate racial discrimination and their unskilled, low-wage labor status. As a "protected market," black beauty culture emerged as a result of black women's exclusion from the mainstream labor force, their denial of services by majority merchants, their spatial concentration in segregated urban black communities, their "social distance" from whites, and their unique cultural attributes (i.e., hairdressing needs) which were difficult for external white merchants to understand. Boyd argued that beauty culture was a very attractive option for unskilled black female southern migrants arriving in the North. Beauty culture had low barriers to entry and a hierarchical structure that yielded opportunities for advancement as black women could start practicing in their homes and eventually open shops. Consequently, black beauty culture provided unemployment

³⁸ Leah Platt Boustan and William J. Collins, "The Origin and Persistence of Black-White Differences in Women's Labor Force Participation," October 2013, accessed May 31, 2014 from: www.nber.org/chapters/c12902.pdf; There was a small number of black female nurses and teachers.

³⁹ Sharon Harley, "For the Good of Family and Race: Gender, Work and Domestic Roles in the Black Community, 1880-1930," *Signs*, 15, 2 (Winter 1990): 336-349.

⁴⁰ Evelyn Nakano Glenn, "Racial Ethnic Women's Labor: The Intersection of Race, Class, and Gender Oppression," *Review of Radical Political Economics* 17, 3 (1985): 86-108.

protection and “a mobility ladder with no counterpart in any other segment of the economy.”⁴¹

Boyd asserted that black beauty culture provided black women with the flexibility to “combine paid work and family activities.”⁴² Harley has confirmed that this flexibility was important to black female wage earners who “tended to view themselves as self-sacrificing mothers, wives, aunts, and sisters or as race uplifters rather than workers.”⁴³

The value they attributed to work found meaning in its utility within a hostile society:

Indeed, the importance of their labor market activities was that it provided them with the means to fulfill felt personal obligations to family members and needy non-kin. Paid work also provided Afro-American women and men with the ability, however minimal, to assist institutions (primarily the church) and organizations within the black community financially. Key elements of core black culture and religion were (and/are) sharing and giving; paid work allowed black women (and men) to fulfill sharing and giving obligations to those less fortunate.⁴⁴

The employment opportunities created by Madam Walker thus provided a pathway for black women to autonomy and pride.

The MCJWMC offered positions inside the company for administrative and manufacturing duties as well as contractual arrangements for sales agents, travelling agents, and salon owners, which paid a range of wages and salaries. Payroll reports from 1915 to 1917 indicate employees who worked in the office and factory of the company made between \$1.50 per week and \$25 per week. Some temporary or part time workers were at the lower end of this range, while Walker’s closest confidants were at the higher

⁴¹ Robert Boyd, “The Great Migration to the North and the Rise of Ethnic Niches for African American Women in Beauty Culture and Hairdressing, 1910-1920,” *Sociological Focus*, 29, 1 (February 1996): 33-45, 37, 43, 37, 42.

⁴² Robert Boyd, “The Great Migration to the North and the Rise of Ethnic Niches for African American Women in Beauty Culture and Hairdressing, 1910-1920,” *Sociological Focus*, 29, 1 (February 1996): 41.

⁴³ Sharon Harley, “For the Good of Family and Race: Gender, Work and Domestic Roles in the Black Community, 1880-1930,” *Signs*, 15, 2 (Winter 1990): 348.

⁴⁴ Sharon Harley, “For the Good of Family and Race: Gender, Work and Domestic Roles in the Black Community, 1880-1930,” *Signs*, 15, 2 (Winter 1990): 348.

end. For instance, Alice Kelly, Walker's assistant and tutor, made \$15 per week in 1915 and had received increases that amounted to \$25 per week by 1917. Violet Davis, Walker's secretary, was paid \$15 per week by 1917. As Walker's general manager and counsel, Freeman B. Ransom exceeded the salary range with \$8,000 per year in 1918, which rose to \$13,000 per year in 1919 after he assumed leadership of the company following Walker's death.⁴⁵ Walker also gave her staff shares in the company valued at \$10 each, which added to their total compensation and gave them a stake in the company's success and an asset base upon which to build.⁴⁶

Walker also employed a cadre of special travelling agents charged to create new markets, teach "the art of hair culture," lecture about and promote the company and industry, and sell goods. The compensation for these individuals varied. Harry D. Evans of Indianapolis was paid \$125 per month along with a 50% commission on new customer orders and a 25% commission on refills of existing customer orders. He and travelling agent, Janet Johnson, focused on getting Walker products on the shelves of pharmacies. Louis W. George of New York was paid per each one dozen case of products he sold to merchants. Rather than sell goods, A.C. Burnett was paid for recruiting agents and delivering her presentations and demonstrations in emerging urban markets around the South. These special travelling agents maintained arduous schedules which covered multiple cities and regions in short spans of time.⁴⁷

In terms of her sales agents, Madam Walker did not believe in salaries. Given the importance of active cultivation of a clientele base, Walker remarked, "I don't think it a

⁴⁵ Payroll Statements 1915-1917, Box 27, Folder 2, MCJWP; Payroll Statements, Box 27, Folder 3, MCJWP; G.S. Olive to FBR September 15, 1919, Box 27, Folder 6, MCJWP.

⁴⁶ Notice of Meeting to Increase Stock, July 7, 1919, Box 7, Folder 7, MCJWP.

⁴⁷ Special Agent's Contract 1916, Box 7, Folder 11, MCJWP; Contracts with Special Agents 1917-1919 Box 7, Folder 18, MCJWP; A.C. Burnett, Box 9, Folder 16, MCJWP.

good idea to pay salaries; it is better to let them work up their own business.”⁴⁸ So, she had devised a wholesale agreement for agents to purchase Walker products from the company in bulk in one-half or one dozen cases which they could retail for a profit. The hair grower, shampoo, and tetter salve products were sold wholesale to agents for \$3.50 per dozen and retailed at 50 cents per container. The 42% margin produced a profit of \$2.50 per dozen for the agents. The glossine and temple grower products wholesaled for \$2.75 per dozen, and retailed at 35 cents each. The 35% margin produced a profit of \$1.45 per dozen for the agents. Records show some agents ordered up to ten dozen cases of products many times during any given year. Obviously, the larger an agent’s clientele base, the higher the volume of sales and resulting profits. These profits complemented those earned from dressing hair and performing other beauty culture personal hygiene services, such as facial massage.⁴⁹

Maggie Wilson from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, became an agent in 1911 and developed a lucrative clientele base. After thirteen years as an agent, she credited Walker with opening “up a trade for hundreds of our colored women to make an honest and profitable living and where they make as much in one week as a month’s salary would bring from any other position a colored woman can secure.... I advise all who have not ‘learned the trade’ or tried her wonderful goods to start at once.”⁵⁰ An unnamed agent in Cleveland, Ohio, reportedly transitioned from being unemployed with no income to a

⁴⁸ Madam Walker to Freeman B. Ransom, April 18, 1918, Box 1, Folder 10, MCJWP.

⁴⁹ Walker Manufacturing Company Order Form, Box 30, Folder 1, MCJWP; The rates agents may have charged for other beauty culture services—such as hairdressing, massage, or manicures—are not discernable from the company’s records.

⁵⁰ The Madam C.J. Walker Manufacturing Co. *1924 Yearbook and Almanac* (Indianapolis: 1924), 18, Beinecke Rare Books and Manuscripts Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT (hereafter cited as BRBML).

Walker agent earning \$900 per year within three years.⁵¹ Mrs. Robert Walker from Ithaca, New York, a city with a small black population, became an agent in 1917. She started with two customers and eventually served between forty and fifty regular clients. She informed the company, “I have had wonderful success since I have been doing the work.... [M]y business has been constantly increasing.... Sometimes I wonder how I can accommodate them all.” Walker gave her agents three ways to generate income: 1) perform beauty treatments; 2) sell products; and 3) refer and train agents.⁵² Black women were eager to work for Walker and grateful for the opportunity her business presented them.⁵³

As an industry, black beauty culture had low barriers to entry, which was part of its appeal.⁵⁴ Walker frequently went to great lengths to further reduce or completely remove what few barriers remained for the most destitute among the prospective agents and salon owners she recruited. To become an agent required payment of a \$25 fee and some initial training. This fee entitled the new agent to starter cases of products, pricing sheets, a Walker Company outfit, and authorization to buy Walker Company products wholesale and sell them retail. Many agents signed up and paid the fee either directly before or after participating in a live demonstration of beauty culture techniques and products, typically conducted by Walker herself. This orientation was sufficient to get the women started selling products and offering services out of their homes or door to door.

⁵¹ “The Negro Woman in Business: Madam C.J. Walker Urges her Sisters to Rise above the Wash Tub and Cook Kitchen and Make a Place in the Commercial World,” *Indianapolis Freeman*, September 20, 1913, p. 1.

⁵² The Madam C.J. Walker Manufacturing Co. *1924 Yearbook and Almanac* (Indianapolis: 1924), 18, BRBML.

⁵³ The Madam C.J. Walker Manufacturing Co. *1924 Yearbook and Almanac* (Indianapolis: 1924), 15, 10, BRBML.

⁵⁴ See Robert Boyd, “The Great Migration to the North and the Rise of Ethnic Niches for African American Women in Beauty Culture and Hairdressing, 1910-1920,” *Sociological Focus*, 29, 1 (February 1996):41-42.

Walker was largely successful in collecting the \$25 fee registration fee, but on occasion, she lowered or eliminated it for black women who were very poor and struggling to do better for themselves and their families. This practice was a mix of Walker's compassion for others and competitive drive to defeat her business rivals. Having been a washerwoman, Walker identified with the struggling women, who were wives, mothers, and caretakers in need of better economic opportunities to fulfill their responsibilities. Simultaneously, Walker knew that Annie Malone of the Poro Company and many other beauty culture proprietors were actively recruiting agents on a daily basis. These businesses were in a race to achieve the highest possible volume of sales which was directly proportional to the number of agents actively selling in the field. The combination of compassion and competition was evident in Walker's communications about her recruitment efforts.

For example, while in St. Louis in March 1918, Walker signed up a new agent whom she described in a letter to Freeman B. Ransom as "a poor woman who lost her all by fire." This tragic circumstance was clearly a point of sympathy for Walker. She continued, "I am letting her sell but making her [sign a contract] for our protection you take whatever [precaution] you think best. Don't send outfit."⁵⁵ While she was empathetic towards the woman, Walker remained cognizant of the risk as well, as she noted Ransom should not send the customary Walker outfit and continue to monitor the situation. In another letter sent to Ransom that same week, Walker stated, "I am making the offer of fifteen [dollars] to agents where ever I go and if they can't pay that, take what they can pay you until they can. Let them pay in installments, as I am going after the

⁵⁵ Madam Walker to Freeman B. Ransom, March 2, 1918, Box 1, Folder 9, MCJWP.

fifty-eight thousand agents.”⁵⁶ This ten dollar reduction in the registration fee reflected Walker’s desire both to be helpful and to be competitive. The fifty-eight thousand agents reference was a goal to grow her workforce which was comprised of approximately 20,000 agents at the time. One week later in Chicago, Illinois, Walker noted that she was able to attract her competitor’s agents to her speaking engagements and public demonstrations, with some even turning in their training certificates from the other company as they switched over to the Walker system. Perhaps, the fee reduction further enticed those agents to defect, as Walker noted, “Some of the Poro girls came directly from the [Poro] college to take my work and paid some money on the trade. I have a Poro diploma to return into the office. Many more are going to take.”⁵⁷ Walker had figured that reaching her goal of more than doubling her agent workforce would not only require recruiting new women into beauty culture, but also converting other companies’ agents over to the Walker method. If these Poro agents were convinced by Walker’s presentation—and other unknown circumstances that initially made the possibility of leaving Poro attractive—to “take” to the Walker method and become agents, Walker had surmised that others would as well.

Walker also extended support to prospective salon owners by providing initial capital that did not always have to be repaid. In April 1918, Walker directed Ransom to make rent payments on behalf of a new shop opening in Columbus, Ohio, without apparent reference to any repayment agreement.⁵⁸ Sometimes Walker provided partial support, as in the case of Florence Moss Blackwell to whom she gave \$50 towards the

⁵⁶ Madam Walker to Freeman B. Ransom, March 6, 1918, Box 1, Folder 9, MCJWP.

⁵⁷ Madam Walker to Freeman B. Ransom, March 11, 1918 Chicago, Illinois; Poro was a reference to the company of Walker’s former employer and chief rival, Annie Malone.

⁵⁸ Madam Walker to Freeman B. Ransom, April 6, 1918, Folder 1, Box 10, MCJWP.

\$175 start-up cost for a beauty parlor in Savannah, Georgia. As a widow, Blackwell approached the company to take its training and quickly opened a shop. A month after providing the money, travelling agent A.C. Burnett, who visited Georgia to check in on agents, reported that Blackwell was “getting along fine.”⁵⁹ In another case involving a shop that Walker apparently funded completely, she contracted with a Mrs. Shelton to manage the parlor and keep profits, but make fixed monthly payments until the cost of the parlor was recouped.⁶⁰

In terms of Walker’s motivations for helping prospective agents, it certainly behooved her to have as many agents as possible in the competitive terrain of beauty culture. She was very cognizant of her competitors and their increasing success in recruiting their own agents. For Walker, more agents could equal more revenues and greater profits, but agents had to produce in order for this calculation to work. There was still great risk to Walker in either wholly or partially subsidizing new agents, particularly those already struggling to make ends meet. Walker had been making such arrangements on a case-by-case basis at least since 1915, but she did not want it publicized. In confusion over the case of Carrie B. Harris, Walker confirmed for Ransom in a letter that “I remember her coming to be me and I think I had her sign up a contract. She doesn’t care to do the work and in fact she is not able to. She is almost an object of charity⁶¹ and if she hasn’t her contract please send it to her. I am simply giving her that much making her an agent but she shouldn’t go out telling it.”⁶² In this instance, Walker’s

⁵⁹ A.C. Burnett to Freeman B. Ransom, May 28, 1918, Box 9, Folder 16, MCJWP; A.C. Burnett to Freeman B. Ransom, June 22, 1918, MCJWP.

⁶⁰ Madam Walker to Robert Brokenburr, April 11, 1918, Pittsburgh, PA, MCJWP.

⁶¹ This use of “charity” appears to be the only time in the Walker Collection Archives in which Walker used it in a pejorative sense. Usually, charity and philanthropy were used interchangeably to describe Walker’s efforts to uplift the race.

⁶² Madam Walker to Freeman B. Ransom, April 18, 1918, Folder 1, Box 10, MCJWP.

compassionate side seemed to outweigh the competitive one as she clearly lacked confidence in Harris' ability to perform, but, nonetheless, felt compelled to work with her. Still, Walker's compassion seemed to have limits as she was clearly frustrated by Harris.

While the sentiments expressed by Walker regarding Harris could certainly be dismissed as merely good business because of the gain Walker stood to experience for having as large of a workforce as possible, they also reflect a generous attitude toward her employees and prospective employees, which, at a minimum coexisted with other self-interests. Once a struggling, widowed migrant with a child herself, Walker had never forgotten the difficulties of her own earlier personal experiences and the help she received during that time. Her company offered a chance to overcome such struggles and she wanted as many black women to have the option as possible. In this respect, her company represented a philanthropic ideal. Floyd Snelson, an AME minister who evangelized and built churches around the world, praised Walker as a great "Benefactress of Her Race," but not because of her financial gifts to organizations.⁶³ For Snelson, Walker's employment of the unemployable in a hostile land was her claim to the philanthropic moniker. This sentiment was echoed decades later when the black trade periodical *Beauticians Journal* described the Walker Company as "Unparalleled in its historic growth as the big pioneer in beauty culture and undisputed as the foremost philanthropic institution [sic] among Negro Americans."⁶⁴ But the appeal of the

⁶³ Floyd Snelson, "Slave Cabin to Queen's Palace," ca. 1940, Box 12, Folder 4, MCJWP; For a biography of Snelson, see Richard R. Wright, Jr., *Centennial Encyclopaedia of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* (Philadelphia: Book Concern of the AME Church, 1916), 210.

⁶⁴ *Beauticians Journal*, "First Negro Woman Millionaire Manufacturer," 1951, 3, Box 12, Folder 8, MCJWP.

MCJWMC was not only economic; it also engaged black women in customary ways that were comfortable to them, namely through education and clubs.

Lelia College and the Madam C.J. Walker Beauty Schools

In 1908, while living in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Madam Walker established Lelia College, a training school in beauty culture. Named for her daughter, the college was managed by Lelia to enable Madam Walker to travel, sell her products, and refer black women to the college for training. Lelia College became one of two leading beauty schools—the other was Annie Malone’s Poro College—providing training to black women in the early twentieth century and attracted a large base of students.⁶⁵ Lelia College opened another location in Harlem, after Lelia left Pittsburgh for New York City in 1913. The acclaim of Lelia College and its reach was largely due to its offering of a \$25 correspondence course, through which students could learn beauty culture at home. Those students who completed the course received a diploma signed by Walker and were permitted to sell products on behalf of the company.

Despite its early success, the Lelia College beauty school brand did not last, but several Walker Beauty Schools developed and lasted for decades after Walker’s death in 1919.⁶⁶ With locations in St. Louis, Dallas, Chicago, and Kansas City, these beauty schools trained thousands of black women in Madam Walker’s method and system of beauty culture and catapulted them into careers that enabled them to support themselves and their families. As an extension of the MCJWMC, the beauty schools were an

⁶⁵ Tiffany Gill, *Beauty Shop Politics: African American Women’s Activism in the Beauty Industry* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 25.

⁶⁶ There were Lelia College locations in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Harlem, New York; and Indianapolis, Indiana. It is not clear where other locations may have been or exactly when and why the Walker Beauty School moniker replaced it. “Special to the Freeman,” *Indianapolis Freeman*, October 23, 1915, p. 1.

important aspect of Walker's overall organizational strategy. The rationale for and curriculum of the schools contributed to the company's fusion of commerce and philanthropy.

The rationale for starting a chain of beauty schools was multi-fold. First, Walker needed agents in order to successfully compete in the densely-populated landscape of black beauty culturists. Companies like the Poro Company and Overton Hygienic Manufacturing Company were in various stages of their own evolution, but represented significant marketplace presences nonetheless. The advertising pages of black newspapers from the early twentieth century revealed just how intense competition was between these companies. It was fairly common for ads from Poro and Walker to jockey for prime position in the news pages with other lesser known brands.⁶⁷ Such ads frequently appeared next to each other or on the same page, and often engaged in reactive and adversarial discourse over quality and authenticity that carried across several editions. The black newspapers were also cluttered with the marketing messages and images of dozens of local competitors in markets across the North and South. While being significantly smaller than Walker's primary rivals, these local competitors sometimes acted as free-riders who used the likeness and substance of the Walker brand to peddle their own products.⁶⁸ Walker was particularly frustrated by these imposters who had coopted, repackaged, and resold her formulas without any training, authorization, or affiliation, and, thus, undercut her own brand and profits. A beauty school became a

⁶⁷ For examples, see *Indianapolis Freeman*, Saturday, June 12, 1915, p 2; *Indianapolis Freeman*, Saturday, September 25, 1915, p. 2.

⁶⁸ See *Indianapolis Recorder*, "Madam CR Walker's New Discovery," December 30, 1916. A black woman from Utah who was trained at Poro College (Annie Malone's school) set up shop in Indianapolis and called herself "Madam CR Walker." She recruited agents and canvassers to sell cosmetics in close proximity to Madam C.J. Walker's company.

means for attracting hairdressers and agents into the company in such a competitive landscape and deploying them into the field.

In support of this staffing objective, beauty schools further reduced the extant low barriers to entry into beauty culture. Few capital and infrastructure resources were needed to be successful in beauty culture. It could be practiced out of one's home and its products could be sold door to door.⁶⁹ The primary requirement became one of acquiring the knowledge, skills, and products so one could work. During her leadership of the company, Walker personally travelled the country "making agents"—as she called it—by providing on-site training in local communities following her speaking engagements. As previously mentioned, she also employed a cadre of travelling agents who did the same. But these individuals could only be in a certain number of places and train a limited number of people at a time. Lelia College and the subsequent chain of Walker Beauty Schools institutionalized this process and disbursed it geographically in major U.S. cities so that "making agents" became routine and occurred on a larger scale.

The beauty schools also enabled Walker to substantiate her claims for beauty culture as a profession by establishing a recognized educational credential and building a loyal workforce.⁷⁰ Regarding black beauty culturists, historian Tiffany Gill observed that "While their work was considered unskilled labor by some, they were credentialed and,

⁶⁹ See Robert Boyd, "The Great Migration to the North and the Rise of Ethnic Niches for African American Women in Beauty Culture and Hairdressing, 1910-1920," *Sociological Focus*, 29, 1 (February 1996): 33-45.

⁷⁰ Walker did not live to see the national recognition beauty culture would later receive in the middle of the twentieth century, but her early efforts in starting beauty schools and organizing national associations for beauty culture contributed to such recognition as did the individual efforts of her education director, Marjorie Stewart Joyner, who continued the push long after Walker's death. Walker did live to see a change in Booker T. Washington's perspective on beauty culture following her speeches at his National Negro Business League conventions in 1912 and 1913. While the NNBL had largely ignored beauty culture prior to Madam Walker's speeches, it made beauty culture a conference theme in 1915.

eventually, licensed professionals.”⁷¹ This development was significant for working-class black women with limited options in the labor market because earning the credential from the Walker schools was a source of pride and could be immediately rewarded by employment through affiliation with the company, either as an agent, independent salon owner, or salon employee. In 1915, Mabel Marble announced her graduation in the *Indianapolis Freeman* newspaper which described her as “the proud possessor of a diploma.”⁷² Marble became an agent for the MCJWMC and, two years later, taught the Walker method to students at black industrial colleges in the South on behalf of the company. The beauty credentialing process trained black women in the art and science of beauty culture, and the appropriate use of products and techniques, but it also obligated them to use only Walker products, which protected Walker’s market share and guaranteed a workforce.⁷³

Finally, the beauty schools represented Madam Walker’s embrace of industrial education, at least in part, as one of many means for black achievement of economic self-sufficiency and the rights of citizenship.⁷⁴ The *Indianapolis Freeman* newspaper described Walker as “an ardent believer in the philosophy of Dr. Booker T. Washington.”⁷⁵ Walker saw her own life as having a similar trajectory as Washington’s

⁷¹ Tiffany M. Gill, *Beauty Shop Politics: African American Women’s Activism in the Beauty Industry* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 5.

⁷² “Special to the Freeman,” *Indianapolis Freeman*, October 23, 1915, p. 1.

⁷³ Tiffany Gill, *Beauty Shop Politics: African American Women’s Activism in the Beauty Industry* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 5.

⁷⁴ Walker’s approach to equality was pragmatic and reflected versatility in moving between and simultaneously embracing seemingly competing strategies. She valued industrial education and sought to offer it to others, but she also employed her own personal tutor and filled her personal library with and voraciously read the kind classical literature W.E.B. Du Bois espoused. She financially supported Tuskegee Institute, the Daytona Normal School, Haines Normal Institute and other industrial education institutions, but she was also a significant member of, donor to, and volunteer for the NAACP.

⁷⁵ “The Negro Woman in Business: Madam C.J. Walker Urges her Sisters to Rise Above the Wash Tub and Cook Kitchen and Make a Place in the Commercial World,” *Indianapolis Freeman*, September 20, 1913, p. 1.

and she relentlessly pursued his approval and endorsement.⁷⁶ She believed in the Tuskegee idea and set up scholarships at the institution to support Washington's students. She even envisioned creating what she called "the Tuskegee of Africa," a vocational institution in South Africa. She also worked with the heads of other industrial and vocational institutions to offer her beauty curriculum to their students, and subsidized the building of necessary laboratory spaces on their campuses as well as the salaries of instructors.⁷⁷ The educational promise and potential of the beauty schools were important to Walker, who as a child had not had access to formal education, and who as an adult regularly experienced and strived to overcome the lingering legacy of that omission every day.

The MCJWMC produced a training manual to guide coursework in the Walker chain of beauty schools. Entitled *The Madam C.J. Walker Beauty Manual: A Thorough Treatise Covering all Branches of Beauty Culture*, this 208-page text detailed the fundamentals of the Walker system of beauty culture.⁷⁸ The original curricular materials that Walker devised and used during her own training sessions have not survived. However, this text, which was published in the late 1920s, is the closest approximation and was likely based in whole or at least in part upon Walker's original materials. This first edition text contains pictures of what are said to be Madam Walker's hands doing a woman's hair using the principles from the text. From its beginning, the text set a tone

⁷⁶ Many black entrepreneurs pursued Washington's endorsement because of his status and influence as the premier race leader who could devastate entities or individuals at odds with him; however, Walker personally identified with his story and believed, if not in industrial training as a whole, then certainly in training for beauty culture, as an important avenue for racial uplift and self-help.

⁷⁷ See Chapter Three for discussion of Walker's donations to black colleges and industrial institutes for the purposes of offering her beauty culture curriculum.

⁷⁸ *The Madam C.J. Walker Beauty Manual: A Thorough Treatise Covering all Branches of Beauty Culture*, First Edition (The Madam C.J. Walker Manufacturing Company: Indianapolis, Indiana, ca. 1928), Indianapolis Reading Room Collection, Indianapolis-Marion County Public Library, Indiana (hereafter cited as IRRC).

that invoked the presence and legacy of Madam Walker for students. It began with a history of Walker's life, company, and benevolence. This history was presented in triumphant fashion, clearly meant to not only inform, but to inspire Walker students, gain their loyalty to the Walker legacy and company, and convince them to see themselves in Walker's story. By chronicling the depths of Walker's difficult life and the heights of her success, the narrative sought to convince students that just like Madam Walker their success was in their own hands and the Walker Company could help them achieve it.

The triumphant narrative began opposite a page that contained pictures of the small, run-down slave quarters on the Delta, Louisiana, plantation on which Sarah Breedlove was born in 1867 juxtaposed with a picture of the extravagant 32-room mansion named Villa Lewaro that Madam Walker built in Irvington-on-the-Hudson, New York in 1916.⁷⁹ The pain and struggle of Sarah's early life was conveyed through references to her as an "orphan" and "widow" who endured "hardships and much toil" and faced "many discouragements and obstacles," including friends who did not believe in her dreams of a better life. Walker's students would have had similar struggles and disappointments, particularly in a world where segregation and discrimination were the law and back-breaking menial work rarely covered their family expenses.

Despite such despair, the text reminded students that Madam Walker was "determined and felt inspired" as she was guided by her religious beliefs. The text created a vivid image of Madam Walker in partnership with Jesus Christ himself, noting that "by placing her hand in His," she set out with the potential to "convert the world by the wonderful good she would do for her people." The reference clearly delineated Walker's

⁷⁹ The name "Lewaro" was created by combining the first two letters of Walker's daughter's first, middle, and last names, Lelia Walker Robinson.

core religious faith in a just God who would help the downtrodden and guide the efforts of those seeking to improve themselves and serve others. This kind of faith and service to others marked the point of departure for Sarah's struggles.⁸⁰

The narrative began its ascent as the early days of Sarah's business in Denver, Colorado, and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, were recounted, leading to the factory being built in Indianapolis, Indiana, agents and goods being sold in every state, and advertisements published overseas in four different languages. Walker enjoyed the fruits of her labor including her ability to build "the finest home owned by any member of the race in this country," a reference to Villa Lewaro. The text reminded students that these fruits were proceeds of Walker's efforts and informed them that self-improvement was very important because Walker "read everything in sight, including the Bible, which she called her main guide." She hired a tutor and studied relentlessly after business hours—an emphasis that noted studying should not take precedence over the daily work needed but should run parallel—and read classical literature. Walker's self-improvement not only focused on the typical liberal arts elements of learning thought to increase knowledge and build character, but also the rudiments of business. The text noted, "As her business grew she made up her mind to develop with it, to that end she took lessons in commercial and business courses until she developed into a well-informed business woman." It was unknown exactly when and where Walker would have taken such courses, but the message was clear that success as a Walker Beauty School student and eventual agent, salon owner, or beauty culturist required dedicated physical work in the matters of business, but also dedicated mental and intellectual work in matters of education and

⁸⁰ *The Madam C.J. Walker Beauty Manual: A Thorough Treatise Covering all Branches of Beauty Culture*, First Edition (The Madam C.J. Walker Manufacturing Company: Indianapolis, Indiana, ca. 1928), 15, IRRC.

continual self-improvement. Even still, work ethic and educational development were only part of the story.⁸¹

The opening biographical section of the text concluded with a history of Madam Walker's benevolence. The text recounted Walker's \$1,000 gift to the Indianapolis YMCA, her annual in-kind gifts of Christmas baskets to poor families, and several other financial gifts to organizations working for racial uplift, as well as her bequests to charity. The text described the influence of Walker's giving which "served not only to encourage others, but aroused them to a true high sense of duty." Naming Walker a "race woman," the text tied her business acumen and success to her generosity and faith by emphasizing that the company was founded and operated on the principle of unselfish service that should be "emulated by others who are in a position to help the race and racial enterprises."⁸² The company clearly wanted its future agents to be generous, and committed to the race as well as loyal to the brand.

By opening the text in this manner, the Walker Company used Walker's life story to engage and challenge its beauty school students to follow in her footsteps, much as Walker had done through her own captivating speeches and presentations. The *Indianapolis Freeman* newspaper had described Walker's presentation style as being comprised of a "fine well-modulated voice with its splendid carrying qualities.... [Her] language was choice, leaving nothing wanting for a most eventful career should her lines be cast in that direction. She was unmistakably appreciated, creating an impression that

⁸¹ *The Madam C.J. Walker Beauty Manual: A Thorough Treatise Covering all Branches of Beauty Culture*, First Edition (The Madam C.J. Walker Manufacturing Company: Indianapolis, Indiana, ca. 1928), 16, IRRC.

⁸² *The Madam C.J. Walker Beauty Manual: A Thorough Treatise Covering all Branches of Beauty Culture*, First Edition (The Madam C.J. Walker Manufacturing Company: Indianapolis, Indiana, ca. 1928), 21, IRRC.

will never down in the hearts and minds of those who heard her.”⁸³ No audience was too small or too large for Walker. She spoke in the basements of churches and fraternal lodges as well as in the conventions halls and annual meetings of the National Negro Business League, the Lott Carey Baptist Missionary Association, the National Baptist Convention, and the Knights of Pythias.⁸⁴

Early on, Walker had recognized the philanthropic quality of her life story, and she had usually included it in her speeches along with her business and financial successes, and charitable giving. It was not uncommon for her to pass out pamphlets containing her life story to her audiences to inspire them, as she had done at the 1914 meeting of the NACW in Wilberforce, Ohio.⁸⁵ The *Indianapolis Freeman* reported on Walker’s speeches and noted that her frequently delivered “Negro Woman in Business” speech emphasized “to her sisters the importance of their getting into the world of business, of acquiring a footing in the soil, of making themselves financially independent and setting an example for all people of thrift, industry.” Walker wove her life story into the presentation and used it “as an object lesson to others of her sex and race.”⁸⁶ In total, the effects of her speaking were dramatic as she “told of her career, her struggle from the depths to the exalted position where she now stands, a race example and inspiration to the drooping hopes of her kind.”⁸⁷ Walker’s audiences were generally moved to action, particularly black women who aspired to achieve as Walker had. They donated money to

⁸³ “Mme. C.J. Walker’s Travelogue a Success,” *Indianapolis Freeman*, January 22, 1916, p. 4.

⁸⁴ “The Negro Woman in Business: Madam C.J. Walker Urges her Sisters to Rise above the Wash Tub and Cook Kitchen and Make a Place in the Commercial World,” *Indianapolis Freeman*, September 30, 1913, p. 1.

⁸⁵ “A Generous Heart: Dedicated to Mme. C.J. Walker,” *Indianapolis Freeman*, November 28, 1914, p. 8.

⁸⁶ “The Negro Woman in Business: Madam C.J. Walker Urges her Sisters to Rise above the Wash Tub and Cook Kitchen and Make a Place in the Commercial World,” *Indianapolis Freeman*, September 30, 1913, p. 1.

⁸⁷ “MMe. C.J. Walker’s Travelogue a Success,” *Indianapolis Freeman*, January 22, 1916, p. 4.

her favorite charities, like the Alpha Home. They signed up to become agents or to take correspondence courses through Lelia College. Many felt better about themselves, and inspired by having heard Walker, like twenty-three year old Bettiola Fortsen, a black hat-maker and suffragist from Chicago, Illinois, who wrote a poem in honor of Walker and had it published in the *Indianapolis Freeman*.⁸⁸

In such difficult and racially hostile times of the early twentieth century, Madam Walker's story had a philanthropic quality and currency to it that amounted to a gift amidst a larger societal narrative that ridiculed black life as inhuman and worthless. Walker's story presented a counter-narrative which emphasized the humanity, self-determination, resilience, and generosity of black life. This narrative showed how Walker overcame life's obstacles through faith, perseverance, hard work, and a philanthropic commitment to "the betterment of humanity and her race."⁸⁹ As a text in the beauty school, this story sought to inculcate the same values into students and build their loyalty so that they would use the Walker system to achieve their own independence and dreams, which also benefited the company financially and its efforts to uplift the race.

The curriculum in the text contained five sections. The first covered foundations of beauty culture practice related to sterilization of instruments, hygiene, and sanitation. It also included substantial content on physiology, anatomy, and genetic composition of hair. The second section contained chapters on the human scalp and the diagnosis and treatment of scalp diseases. The third section discussed shampooing and other hair processing techniques such as pressing, cutting, dyeing, bleaching, waving, and curling.

⁸⁸ "A Generous Heart: Dedicated to Mme. C.J. Walker," *Indianapolis Freeman*, November 28, 1914, p. 8; *Broad Ax*, "Miss Bettiola Fortsen," August 1, 1914, p. 2.

⁸⁹ *The Madam C.J. Walker Beauty Manual: A Thorough Treatise Covering all Branches of Beauty Culture*, First Edition (The Madam C.J. Walker Manufacturing Company: Indianapolis, Indiana, 1928), 16, IRRC.

The fourth section engaged nail manicuring, facial massage, cosmetics, skin care, diet, and weight control. The final section covered aspects of managing a beauty shop including marketing, recordkeeping, and personal conduct. In these ways, Walker's curriculum assumed the tone and approach of industrial education as promoted by Booker T. Washington. Particular processes, skills, and techniques were taught to enable students to earn a living and support their families. However, while the character of the early educational culture of Lelia College and the Walker Beauty Schools is unclear, later in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, the schools, in many ways, assumed the approach of more traditional higher education institutions and offered extended curriculum and extra-curricular activities which suggested something more than the mere impartation of vocational skill was taking place.

For instance, the Walker Beauty School in Kansas City offered "Practical Classes" and "Theory Classes."⁹⁰ In the practical classroom, students wore uniforms in a clinical laboratory setting with equipment in the background and stations set up for servicing customers. Some students stood at the stations and conducted various beauty culture treatments on customers—who may have been other students, volunteers, or members of the public. There were typically five stations for doing hair at which students practiced using dryers, curlers, and other beauty culture implements on their customers. There were also manicure and facial massage stations where students hunched over their customers' hands and performed various functions, or applied electric rotating scrub brushes to their customers' skin. In the theory classes, students also wore their uniforms, but sat in traditional rows. Atop their wooden desk chairs lay their textbooks and

⁹⁰ The Students of the Walker College of Beauty Culture, *The Madame C.J. Walker College of Beauty Culture* (Kansas City: No Publisher, 1946), 13-14, Beinecke Rare Books and Manuscripts Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT (hereafter cited as BRBML).

notepads as their instructor lectured from the front of the classroom. The aforementioned Walker beauty manual text was well suited for both types of classes, as it contained meticulous technical descriptions of beauty culture techniques for the practical classes, and scientific frameworks for understanding scalp disease, anatomy, and other biological and physiological concepts for the theory classes.

Outside of the classroom, the school offered an array of extracurricular activities. There was a basketball team, swimming classes, social events, Christmas parties, and mock wedding events. There was also a sorority for beauty culturists named Lambda Alpha Phi that was dedicated to benevolent and educational activities. Socially, the students elected a queen, and assigned superlatives to each other such as “Most Dramatic,” “Most Talkative,” “Most Faithful,” and “Best Athlete.” In these ways, the Walker Beauty Schools moved in the direction of the tone and approach of the Du Boisian classical model of education that engaged students in studies and activities beyond the manual skill development and toward broader intellectual and personal development.⁹¹

As a result of the aforementioned mix of activities, the commercial aspect of the schools related to generating revenue, reducing barriers to entry, recruiting agents, standardizing quality and practices, and building a credible profession. But the schools were also deeply engrained with black philanthropic values related to education as a key vehicle for uplift in the molds of both Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois, and hygiene and self-esteem in a society that neither cared about nor catered to the personal grooming needs of blacks. How one presented oneself to the world was a reflection of

⁹¹ The Students of the Walker College of Beauty Culture, *The Madame C.J. Walker College of Beauty Culture* (Kansas City: No Publisher, 1946), 7, BRBML.

one's own self-perception and means. Walker recognized the power of beauty culture properly applied to enhance a woman's appearance and the resulting effects on her sense of self. In addition to covering beauty culture processes and techniques, the curriculum also emphasized philanthropy and the expectation that agents would continue her legacy of generosity and uplift. This instruction helped to imbue graduates with Walker's commercial and philanthropic values, ensuring that they would continue to coexist into the future. Madam Walker's national network of clubs for her agents helped to activate and sustain these values.

Madam C.J. Walker's Organization of Agents

In August 1917, Madam Walker organized her agents into a national association.⁹² There were four articulated purposes for the association. First, the association would serve as a mechanism for generating and sustaining unity amongst the agents, who were approaching 20,000 by the end of the decade. The second purpose focused on strengthening ties between the agents and the Walker company, and between the agents themselves. The first two purposes then combined to enable the third and fourth, which were articulated as protecting "all such agents against misrepresentations and false statements of fakes and [imposters], and last, to have this organization, its rules and regulations so strict, and perfect, until it will be utterly impossible for anyone to handle our goods, unless such a one is a regular agent of the Company, and is a member of the National Organization."⁹³ There was another distinct purpose which, although it was not articulated in original notices to the agents introducing the concept, was often

⁹² Such associations would eventually become commonplace in black beauty culture, but Madam Walker and, her rival, Annie Malone, were among the first to organize them.

⁹³ "Notice to the Agents of the Madam C.J. Walker Manufacturing Company," Box 7, Folder 3, MCJWP

repeated in company correspondence—charity. Madam Walker envisioned her agents performing charitable work in their communities as they sold products and advanced beauty culture. Ransom agreed and urged that the clubs “may by entertainments, dues, etc. accumulate a fund, out of which they can do charitable work.”⁹⁴ The association was designed to bring the agents together as a cohesive group for the benefit of their profession, their communities, and, ultimately, their race.

The creation of this national association came on the heels of more than a year of Walker’s organizing clubs at the local level. In April 1916, Madam Walker informed Freeman B. Ransom of a club she organized in New York City and another present in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.⁹⁵ She noted that the New York group would serve to protect agents from counterfeiters and that members decided to contribute to the Washington Memorial, a fund set up to honor the legacy of Booker T. Washington, who had died five months earlier. From the beginning, Walker had considered the rationale for the clubs as being related to both company and community interests. She also envisioned the local groups connecting through a national body in this early conception by asking of Ransom, “What do you think about having a National organization of the agents?” As her trusted adviser, Ransom would quickly turn the concept into a reality; the new national organization held its first convention in 1917.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Freeman B. Ransom to A.C. Burnett, September 9, 1918 Box 9, Folder 10, MCJWP.

⁹⁵ When corresponding with Ransom while travelling, Walker was consistent in noting her location at the top of her letters. This letter did not have a location hand-written on it per her usual convention, but she used Lelia College and Walker Hair Parlor stationary with New York City addresses. So, the new club was most likely organized in New York.

⁹⁶ Madam Walker to Freeman B. Ransom, April 10, 1916, Box 1, Folder 4, MCJWP.

It remains unclear how many start-up clubs there were during these early days, but within a decade there would be more than fifty.⁹⁷ Clubs operated at local, state, and regional levels. Initially, there were at least six regions headquartered in and organized around urban centers including Chicago, Illinois; Muskogee, Oklahoma; Atlanta, Georgia; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Knoxville, Tennessee; and Richmond, Virginia.⁹⁸ The company ran promotions to encourage agents to form and join the clubs. These promotions offered monetary incentives to “stimulate this spirit of organization.” Such rewards included prizes of \$5 to \$500 to agents who sold the most goods, recruited the most new agents, and sent the most delegates to the national convention in August 1917. The company also reduced its usual \$25 start-up fee to \$10 in order to attract new agents and encourage their involvement in the association.⁹⁹

The first annual meeting of the clubs was held in August 1917 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Minutes from the national meetings indicate that they typically lasted three days and were hosted by a church in a major U.S. city. The content of the meetings included speeches, instruction, committee reports, and recognition awards. At the local level, the names of the clubs varied and included Walker Clubs, Walker Benevolent Associations, Walker Beneficial Clubs, and Walker Unions. At the national level, the

⁹⁷ In 1918, Walker suggested that there may have been as many as 125 clubs in 25 states. See Madam Walker to Freeman B. Ransom, January 14, 1918, Box 1, Folder 8, MCJWP. Her number seems to have been an aspiration rather than a fact. The company regularly reported 50 clubs in its yearbooks in the 1920s. See The Madam C.J. Walker Manufacturing Company, *1924 Yearbook and Almanac* (Indianapolis: 1924), 17, IRRC.

⁹⁸ The Madam C.J. Walker Manufacturing Company. *1924 Yearbook and Almanac* (Indianapolis: 1924), BRBML.

⁹⁹ For promotions, see “Notice to the Agents of the Madam C.J. Walker Manufacturing Company,” Box 7, Folder 3, MCJWP. While it appears membership in the association was voluntary, at least one memo template in the Madam C.J. Walker Collection at the Indiana Historical Society indicates the company expected each agent to join and that it would not view “any agent as loyal and regular who refuses to become a member of the Union.” It is not clear whether this became policy or how it may have been monitored or enforced. See “To the Agents of the Madam C.J. Walker Mfg. Company” Memo, Box 7, Folder 3.

unifying body was called the National Beauty Culturists' and Benevolent Association of Madam C.J. Walker Agents, Inc.¹⁰⁰

When seeking to understand Walker's national network of benevolent clubs and associations, scholars have automatically looked to the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) for context.¹⁰¹ There is good reason to do so. In a 1916 letter, Madam Walker acknowledged "Women's Federated clubs" as the inspiration for the creation of the Walker clubs.¹⁰² She was very familiar with NACW's network of local, regional, and national clubs since her first exposure to the group twenty years earlier while living in St. Louis, Missouri.¹⁰³ Further, she had long courted the interest and endorsement of NACW to enhance the brand and credibility of her company. There is no question, then, that the Walker clubs were at least partially modeled after NACW, particularly in relation to their organizational structure. But understanding the internal processes and dynamics of that organizational construct requires the insights of another important cultural and social institution that has not yet been investigated or applied to Walker—African American fraternalism.

Initially, it may seem that African American fraternalism should be dismissed as a frame of reference for the Walker clubs. In the same letter in which Walker named

¹⁰⁰ Both the national conventions and local clubs continued to exist well into the 1960s.

¹⁰¹ Dossett has shown the similarities between the organizational structure of the Madam Walker Benevolent Association and the National Association of Colored Women, which included producing a national newsletter, holding national conventions, and offering rewards for charitable work. She also likened Walker's well-known "Hints to Agents" document, which emphasizes the importance of cleanliness and personal appearance, to clubwomen propaganda; see Kate Dossett, *Bridging Race Divides: Black Nationalism, Feminism, and Integration in the United States, 1896-1935* (Tallahassee: University Press of Florida, 2008), 130. Gill related the group to other professional associations emerging at the time for black nurses and cosmetologists; see Tiffany Gill, *Beauty Shop Politics: African American Women's Activism in the Beauty Industry* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 47. Chapman likened Walker's network of women to the NACW and connected Walker's beauty products to clubwomen's prevailing interest in promoting the respectability of the black women and the race; see Erin Chapman, *Prove It On Me: New Negroes, Sex, and Popular Culture in the 1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 86.

¹⁰² Madam Walker to Freeman B. Ransom, April 17, 1916, Box 1, Folder 4, MCJWP.

¹⁰³ See chapter two for Madam Walker's early life in St. Louis and initial exposure to NACW.

women's federation clubs as an influence, she specifically stated, "I think you misunderstood my meaning. I didn't mean to organize as a Fraternal Society," apparently in response to a letter from Ransom. In further explanation, she continued, "I meant to organize clubs all over the country, and at some time call a meeting of all the agents and form a National....[O]nly there would be no handling of moneys.... Each club will handle its own money."¹⁰⁴ These statements clearly privileged NACW as a source of inspiration for Walker. The NACW certainly influenced the organization's form and structure in its early development, but it was African American fraternalism, as will be shown, that exerted direct and substantive influence on its function, at least in the years immediately following Walker's death in 1919 and perhaps earlier. Black fraternalism explains how the MCJWMC pursued the association's goal of bonding Walker agents into a cohesive body to reinforce their professionalism and community involvement by using the idea of Walker.

In his noted 2002 study, Jason Kaufman characterized American fraternalism as a self-protective, exclusive, and self-segregating form of "competitive voluntarism" through which Americans bonded within gendered, racial, ethnic, and religious private groups that became increasingly homogenous over time.¹⁰⁵ Kaufman viewed black fraternal organizations largely as imitations of white orders, and described African American fraternal orders, in general, as unsuccessful in creating sustained economic cooperation and social cohesion because of their position within broader societal discrimination, their status as "high-exit" organizations that frequently lost members to competing groups, and their fostering of divisions among African Americans rather than

¹⁰⁴ Madam Walker to Freeman B. Ransom, April 17, 1916, Box 1, Folder 4, MCJWP.

¹⁰⁵ Jason Kaufman, *For the Common Good: American Civic Life and the Golden Age of Fraternity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 7.

the requisite unity for securing civil rights. However, more recent research has shown that while African American fraternalism included both parallel (or imitative) orders and distinctive orders, these organizations were not only successful, but prolific and represented particular cultural expressions, and political and social innovations characteristic of the African American experience and essential to the struggle for equality.

Theda Skocpol and Jennifer Oser have labeled African Americans “super-joiners” because of their “special proclivity for association building in many spheres” and their “frequent and intensive use of fraternal forms of organization.” With a heritage dating back to 1775, black fraternal organizations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had memberships composed of higher percentages of the adult population and more lodges per capita than their white counterparts. African Americans created their own lodges after experiencing the policies and practices of exclusion maintained by white lodges. Protest of such treatment frequently led African Americans to circumvent their exclusionary white brethren by connecting directly with the originating orders in Europe to appeal for membership and recognition of their lodges, which was typically granted as in the case of the Prince Hall Masons in 1775 and the Grand United Order of Odd Fellows in 1843. These “parallel” orders were not simple caricatures of white orders as Kaufman asserted; rather, they were expressive of African Americans’ desire for full participation in American society and they achieved larger memberships, networks, and financial assets compared to the black distinctive orders.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ Theda Skocpol and Jennifer Oser, “Organization Despite Adversity: The Origins and Development of African American Fraternal Associations,” *Social Science History*, 28, 3 (September 2004): 402, 418, 372. The term “super-joiners” is a reference to historian Arthur Schlesinger’s pronouncement of America as a

As an organizational form, African American fraternalism had much to offer the Walker clubs. First, like other voluntary associations of the era, black fraternalists were structured as federations of local, state, regional, and national organizations. According to Theda Skocpol, Ariane Liazos and Marshall Ganz, black fraternalism consisted of “massive organizational networks” that not only spanned coast to coast, but also overseas and included both paid and volunteer workers laboring within the administrative layers. With ties to Europe and lodges frequently located in the Bahamas, Liberia, Bermuda, the West Indies, and Central America, black fraternalists had a strong tradition of “transnationalism” that was highly regarded and far more extensive than white fraternalists. But black fraternal orders not only connected people across widespread geographies, they also connected across social classes. Skocpol *et al.* described them as “popularly rooted, cross-class associations” that bonded people from different occupations and religious denominations. Rather than scrutinize prospective members based on class, black fraternalists focused on individual character and were thus able to create “deep roots in the black population by enrolling large numbers of ordinary men and women.”¹⁰⁷ Women played much more extensive and prominent roles in black fraternal organizations than in white orders, which also spoke to the nature of gender relations within the groups.¹⁰⁸ These webs of relations across land, sea, social class, and gender not only fulfilled Madam Walker’s original vision of a dispersed but connected network of women, but also related to her own increasing Pan-Africanist conscientiousness and her desire to

“nation of joiners” due to the prevalence of voluntary associations throughout its history. See Arthur Schlesinger, “Biography of a Nation of Joiners,” *American Historical Review*, 50, 1 (October 1944): 1-25.

¹⁰⁷ Theda Skocpol, Ariane Liazos, and Marshall Ganz, *What a Mighty Power We Can Be: African American Fraternal Groups and the Struggle for Racial Equality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 14, 92-93, 59, 88.

¹⁰⁸ Theda Skocpol and Jennifer Oser, “Organization Despite Adversity: The Origins and Development of African American Fraternal Associations,” *Social Science History* 28, 3 (September 2004): 372.

engage the middle-class clubwomen of NACW with working-class women like her agents.¹⁰⁹

Second, black fraternal organizations also enhanced economic, philanthropic, and civic participation for their members. The mutual aid fostered by black fraternal organizations was substantial and grew out of their pooling of weekly membership dues or other periodic assessments to fund initiatives. Consequently, they frequently offered social insurance, an important asset during a time when white insurance companies regularly denied blacks coverage. Such social insurance—which could have provided for burial expenses, payouts to decedents’ survivors, and sickness benefits in case of incapacitation to work—were of particular import and interest to black women, given their economic roles and responsibilities for their families. Mutual aid also led black fraternal organizations to establish social welfare organizations, such as old folks’ homes and orphanages, and educational scholarships. They also incubated black entrepreneurship through infusions of capital into businesses.¹¹⁰

Third, black fraternal organizations provided opportunities for black men and women to exercise civic leadership skills and competencies through officer positions, committee structures, maintenance of financial and organizational records, events coordination, and conduct of meetings. In a society that denied black citizenship, such activities may have seemed futile to distant observers; but to African Americans themselves, they were vital.

Black organizations were bastions of self-determination and autonomy. In a racially-

¹⁰⁹ For a discussion of Walker’s Pan-Africanism, see Kate Dossett, *Bridging Race Divides: Black Nationalism, Feminism, and Integration in the United States, 1896-1935* (Tallahassee: University Press of Florida), 118-125; for a discussion of Walker’s efforts to engage working-class women in the NACW, see Tiffany Gill, *Beauty Shop Politics: African American Women’s Activism in the Beauty Industry* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press), 44

¹¹⁰ Theda Skocpol, Ariane Liazos, and Marshall Ganz, *What a Mighty Power We Can Be: African American Fraternal Groups and the Struggle for Racial Equality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

divided society hostile to black aspirations, black organizations offered existential evidence of black agency, efficacy, and competency. They gave blacks a means for declaring and living out their humanity, and cultivated avenues for striving and contributing something to the larger good. Compared to white organizations, black fraternal organizations had more leadership posts, which generated more opportunities for civic leadership and service. They also had better systems for promoting local leadership up the ranks into larger governance roles than did their white counterparts. As an example, in the 1880s and 1890s, Jessie Robinson, Walker's friend from St. Louis, was a member of her local Order of the Court of Calanthe, but by the early 1900s, she had become the Supreme Worthy Inspectrix, the Order's national leader. By combining this kind of skill development with regalia and other rituals, black fraternal organizations provided regular time and space for members to publicly assume and display leadership roles otherwise denied them by the larger society.¹¹¹

Fourth, the hallmark of black and white fraternal organizational life was ritualism—the initiations, ceremonies, symbolisms, dramatizations, and other cultural productions that bonded members together based on shared values, beliefs, and identities.¹¹² By engaging in ritual, members affirmed their identification with each other

¹¹¹ Voluntary associations' penchant for incubating civic leadership skills has caused them to be characterized as "schools of citizenship" through which average people learn how to become active citizens. For a general discussion of schools of citizenship, see Elisabeth Clemens, "The Constitution of Citizens," in *The Nonprofit Sector: A Research Handbook*, ed. Walter Powell and Richard Steinberg, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 207-220. For application of schools of citizenship to black fraternal organizations, see Theda Skocpol and Jennifer Oser, "Organization Despite Adversity: The Origins and Development of African American Fraternal Associations," *Social Science History*, 28, 3 (2004), 419; Theda Skocpol, Ariane Liazos, and Marshal Ganz, *What a Mighty Power We Can Be: African American Fraternal Groups and the Struggle for Racial Equality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 80.

¹¹² Mark C. Carnes, *Secret Ritual and Manhood in Victorian America*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

and with particular values and belief systems, and they regularly demonstrated the norms of conduct for meetings.¹¹³

Bayliss Camp and Orit Kent have found partial utility in the existing white fraternal models of proprietorship and helpmateship identified by scholars for explaining some of the differences they observed in the rituals and structures of African American fraternalism.¹¹⁴ They formulated the pilgrimage model to account for more of the distinctions. Under the pilgrimage model, African American fraternal orders were more egalitarian and focused on “collective effort.” Degrees, which were ranks of achievement, were earned through completion of collective projects rather than demonstration of individual skill or authority as in the white male orders. Members were bonded to each other through rituals in magnitudes that exceeded those of the white orders. The African American orders also tended to utilize religious imagery, hymns, and stories from the Christian tradition to a far greater extent than their white counterparts.¹¹⁵

Another prominent difference between the black and white orders had to do with conceptions of charity. After examining the rituals of the eight largest white and black male orders and their female auxiliaries, Camp and Kent identified four conceptions of charity between them: 1) expressive, through which charity was promoted as a virtue;

¹¹³ Theda Skocpol, Ariane Liazos, and Marshall Ganz, *What a Mighty Power We Can Be: African American Fraternal Groups and the Struggle for Racial Equality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 4.

¹¹⁴ Bayliss Camp and Orit Kent, “‘What a Mighty Power We Can Be’: Individual and Collective Identity in African American and White Fraternal Initiation Rituals,” *Social Science History*, 28, 3 (2004): 445. According to Camp and Kent, the proprietorship model focused on hierarchical order and meritocratic advancement and the helpmateship model focused on Victorian womanhood and subordination to men.

¹¹⁵ Bayliss Camp and Orit Kent, “‘What a Mighty Power We Can Be’: Individual and Collective Identity in African American and White Fraternal Initiation Rituals,” *Social Science History*, 28, 3 (2004), 448.

2) instrumental, through which charity was framed as a reciprocal obligation of membership; 3) world-transformative, through which charity was focused on improving the quality of life throughout society beyond the boundaries of the orders; and 4) gendered, through which charity was conceptualized through women's roles in caring for orphans and the sick. These conceptions were more fluid than rigid, and sometimes there was overlap between them. Camp and Kent found that the African American fraternal orders overwhelmingly focused on the instrumental and world-transformative conceptions of charity and utilized collective processes and practices in pursuit of them, while the white orders were more focused on expressive and gendered charity.¹¹⁶ According to Camp and Kent, the Calanthes, rather than fitting perfectly within any one of these conceptions of charity, combined several of them in their efforts to be of service to their communities.

Madam Walker was a member of the Order of Calanthe and had achieved its highest ritual degree, Love.¹¹⁷ The Calanthes were the auxiliary organization of the Knights of Pythias of North America, South America, Europe, Asia, Africa, and Australia (the Colored Knights), the African American parallel order modeled after the segregated white order named the Knights of Pythias. The Colored Knights had been founded in 1880 in Vicksburg, Mississippi after its founders had been denied membership by the white Knights of Pythias in 1864. The motto of the Colored Knights was Friendship, Charity, and Benevolence and the organization focused on supporting members, paying

¹¹⁶ Bayliss Camp and Orit Kent, "What a Mighty Power We Can Be': Individual and Collective Identity in African American and White Fraternal Initiation Rituals," *Social Science History* 28, 3 (2004), 448-449. The Calanthes deviated from Camp and Kent's generalization.

¹¹⁷ "Order of Calanthe Withdrawal Card" Box 2, Folder 15, MCJWP. The Calanthes had three degrees, Fidelity, Harmony, and Love (Charity).

death benefits, and caring for and educating members' widows and children.¹¹⁸ The Colored Knights were known for the flashy, militaristic parades of their Uniform Rank in full regalia named the Army of the Lily through major boulevards in cities around the country, a public demonstration of civic pride and unity.¹¹⁹ The Colored Knights were the third largest black fraternal order in the country, and had a membership of more than 200,000 by the 1920s.¹²⁰ Madam Walker's adviser, Freeman B. Ransom, was a member of the Colored Knights and achieved the level of Grand State Lecturer.

In 1883, the Colored Knights created the Order of Calanthe as an auxiliary comprised of Knights, their wives and female relatives. Its self-described goal was "a large and liberal charity."¹²¹ The order drew its identity from its birth out of Pythianism, just as the biblical Eve was birthed from the rib of Adam. In this way, the Calanthes viewed themselves as "helpmates" of the Knights because "man cannot labor alone...in a work of Charity, Purity, Fidelity, Harmony and Love."¹²² The order had three ritual degrees, Fidelity, Harmony, and Love, which were earned through collective projects.¹²³ Camp and Kent used the Calanthes as an example of their pilgrimage model of black

¹¹⁸ Marilyn T. Peebles, *The Alabama Knights of Pythias of North America, South America, Europe, Asia, Africa, and Australia: A Brief History* (New York: University Press of America, Inc., 2012), 11.

¹¹⁹ Marilyn T. Peebles, *The Alabama Knights of Pythias of North America, South America, Europe, Asia, Africa, and Australia: A Brief History* (New York: University Press of America, Inc., 2012), 12. See W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 65-73. Brundage argued that African American public processions and festivals in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were forms of protest to commandeer prominent public assembly spaces normally used by whites, test the "boundaries of racial etiquette," and "symbolize the ideal of black masculine leadership" in the face of Jim Crow oppression. The military-style parades of black fraternal groups, like the Colored Knights of Pythias, in the early 1900s were reactions to the legal abolition of black militia companies in the South. The response of southern whites to these public events ranged from withdrawal to their homes to "overt intimidation" and "open violence."

¹²⁰ The two largest black fraternal groups were the Prince Hall Masons and the Grand United Order of Odd Fellows. See Theda Skocpol, Ariane Liazos, and Marshall Ganz, *What a Mighty Power We Can Be: African American Fraternal Groups and the Struggle for Racial Equality* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 34-38.

¹²¹ *Ritualistic Ceremonies of the Order of Calanthe* (Chicago: The Fraternal Press, 1914), 5.

¹²² *Ritualistic Ceremonies of the Order of Calanthe* (Chicago: The Fraternal Press, 1914), 4-5.

¹²³ *Ritualistic Ceremonies of the Order of Calanthe* (Chicago: The Fraternal Press, 1914).

fraternalism, and noted that the order used mild forms of hazing, employed significant religious symbolism, and directed its charity toward racial uplift. Further, they identified the Calanthes' conception of charity as gendered, instrumental, and world-transformative, which casted helping others as a reciprocal obligation of membership, women's particular responsibility, and an imperative for redressing social wrongs that afflicted members and society at large.¹²⁴

As members who had achieved several ritual degrees of the Order of Calanthe and the Colored Knights of Pythias respectively, Walker and Ransom had ample experience with fraternalism and access to sacred rituals and other documentation. While it is clear Walker initially looked to NACW as a model for her clubs, it is also evident that black fraternalism served as the model at least after her death, and perhaps sooner. Whether or not Ransom persuaded Walker to use fraternalism while she was alive or simply implemented the model as company leader after her death is inconsequential to the point that, in both instances, the model for the Walker clubs was drawn from leading institutions in black philanthropy. While scholars have explored the NACW connection to the Walker clubs, a new investigation of the presence of fraternalism—specifically fraternal-like ritual—within the clubs deepens understanding of how the clubs pursued their goals of bonding agents and building their professional identities.

Fraternal Ritual in Madam C.J. Walker's Organization of Agents

Two publications by the MCJWMC clearly indicate fraternalism as an influence for the Walker clubs: *The Ritual for the Local Bodies of the National Beauty Culturists'*

¹²⁴ Bayliss Camp and Orit Kent, "'What a Mighty Power We Can Be': Individual and Collective Identity in African American and White Fraternal Initiation Rituals," *Social Science History*, 28, 3 (2004): 471.

and Benevolent Association of Madam C.J. Walker Agents, Inc. (ca. 1920) and the *By-Laws of the Local Bodies of the National Beauty Culturists' and Benevolent Association of Madam C.J. Walker Agents, Inc.* (1927).¹²⁵ Both publications share similarities with the *Ritualistic Ceremonies of the Order of Calanthe* (1914), a publication of Walker and Ransom's fraternal affiliation.

Ritual formed the basis for fraternal bonding. Although it was not as elaborate, colorful, or demonstrative as that of the Colored Knights and the Calanthes, the ritual for the national association of Walker agents prescribed specific processes and procedures for running meetings and conducting business. In the process, it outlined movements and scripted recitations for leadership and membership.

According to the ritual, the president called meetings to order by moving into position, dawning her badge,¹²⁶ striking her gavel three times, and saying:

This being a Fraternal Organization of business people it is meet [sic] that we should always on all occasions bear witness that starting on time is absolutely essential to achieving our aims when we should. The possession of ambition, talent, wealth and vision count for nothing if precious moments of our lives slip away while we constantly wait for the next minute. One minute lost is an opportunity, it may be a fortune lost.¹²⁷

She then issued a brief recitation of a quotation from William Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* to reinforce the importance of time and preparedness for opportunity:

¹²⁵ *Ritual for the Local Bodies of the National Beauty Culturists' and Benevolent Association of Madam C.J. Walker Agents, Inc.* (ca. 1920) Yale University Beinecke Rare Books and Manuscript Library Call # JWW Zan W1505+ N920R (hereafter cited as *Ritual*); *By-Laws for the Local Bodies of the National Beauty Culturists' and Benevolent Association of Madam C.J. Walker Agents, Inc.* (1927) Yale University Beinecke Rare Books and Manuscript Library Call # JWW Zan W1505 927be (hereafter cited as *By-laws*).

¹²⁶ The official regalia and insignia was the National Convention Badge, which came in either yellow or purple fabric with gold frills hanging at the bottom and a cameo of Madam Walker wrapped in a gold color casing and chained to a placard with the word "member" printed on it. For an image of the badge, see www.walkertheatre.com/blog/madam-walker-beauty-culturists-union-convention-ribbon accessed May 2, 2014.

¹²⁷ *Ritual*, 1.

There is a tide in the affairs of men
Which taken at the flood
Leads on to fortune.¹²⁸

The officers of the union then moved into their respective positions in the meeting room, movements reminiscent of those prescribed for the Court of Calanthe's leadership in their ritual. The president then summoned the sergeant-at-arms who was asked to verify that everyone present was "entitled to sit and participate in this meeting."¹²⁹ The sergeant-at-arms examined the membership to ascertain if any were not in good standing and then reported to the president. Good standing meant being accredited by or having no outstanding debts or obligations to the MCJWMC. If all were in good standing, the meeting continued. If not, those undeserving of participation were named and escorted out of the room with "all possible courtesy," and the sergeant-at-arms assumed her ceremonial and watchful position at the door.¹³⁰ The rituals of the Court of Calanthe prescribed a similar review and verification of the membership status of participants at the start of each meeting.¹³¹

Following a roll call of membership, the president was to strike her gavel one time signaling for everyone to rise and sing the "Hairdressers' Ode to Madam C.J. Walker Agents," which was performed to the melody of the religious hymn, "Onward Christian Soldiers":

¹²⁸ *Ritual*, 1.

¹²⁹ *Ritual*, 1.

¹³⁰ *Ritual*, 2.

¹³¹ *Ritualistic Ceremonies of the Order of Calanthe* (Chicago: The Fraternal Press, 1914), 9-10.

Onward, Walker Hair Dressers,
Outward to the fray;
Have your combs all sterilized,
Keep a shining tray;
Be thou not divided,
As one body stand;
Strive to help the Nation,
In this great demand.

Bring, ye, on your shampoo;
Bring, ye, on your salve;
In the name of Walker
Beautify hair.

Think forever of the one
In whose name we stand;
Keep the honor that she won,
The best one in the land.
Treat your client courteous,
Always pleasant be;
Let your smiles and patience
Last eternally.¹³²

The ode used song and verse to uphold Walker standards of practice with opening references to sterilized and presentable equipment undergirded by unity between agents, pleasant interactions with clients, and warm and welcoming personal presentations and appearances. The ode emphasized Madam Walker's reputation, and affirmed the responsibility to maintain it at all cost. The lyrics also laid claim to a larger work. By urging the agents to be out in the "fray" and to strive to "help the Nation," the song linked the work of beauty culture to racial uplift and national improvement of America. In light of the previous Julius Caesar reference, the Ode proclaimed the agents' opportunity to act on behalf of themselves, their families, their race, and their country to continue Walker's legacy of expanding economic opportunity for black women and giving to their communities to make life better for all. By being set to the melody of

¹³² The Madam C.J. Walker Manufacturing Company. *1924 Yearbook and Almanac* (Indianapolis: Madam C.J. Walker Manufacturing Company, 1924), 20, BRBML.

“Onward Christian Soldiers,” the ode was easy to remember and felt familiar to the members, who would also have been devout church attenders. What is more, the recognizable tune created an aura of triumph as the unforgettable tone of the original lyrics instilled the Ode’s words with a military-like fervor to further inculcate into agents the commitment to fight for beauty culture as a profession and Madam Walker’s legacy.

After the song, the president entered into a lengthy statement of purpose which highlighted each individual member’s responsibility to be loyal and committed to each other, the company, and the association. Such loyalty required:

a deep seated, eradicable willingness to put aside jealousy, envy, petty pride, dishonesty of all kinds and each and every day on all occasions in spite of temptation to do otherwise, think, speak and act to help every Walker Agent to be the best possible representative of said Madam C.J. Walker Mfg. Company, the National Association and her union, ever realizing that every time a Walker Agent does well she builds a foundation for a larger life not only for herself but for all of us, and if she does poor work or conducts herself improperly anywhere, she hurts not only herself but she brings discredit upon all of us.¹³³

This statement was undoubtedly an attempt to promote unity and quell any conflicts between the agents. While these women related well to each other, in general, and identified with the association’s goals, conflicts were still present. Deborah Gray White has meticulously outlined the commonplace interpersonal conflicts among black clubwomen. She described the history of black clubwomen as being “about women with missions that varied and often clashed, about women who aimed for progress and unity, but who sometimes fell short, about women who sometimes found the job of representing

¹³³ *Ritual*, 3

and fighting for themselves burdensome.”¹³⁴ These same dynamics clearly existed among the Walker agents as well.

The experience of Margaret Thompson, a Walker agent and parlor owner in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, proved the point. Thompson owned the Thompsino Hair Dressing Parlor through which she offered beauty culture services and trained women in the Walker method.¹³⁵ She was president of the local Walker club, and, in 1917, informed Freeman B. Ransom of two rogue agents, one, whose last name was Walker, had circumvented the company’s distribution line by directly supplying local agents with products at unauthorized prices, and a second, whose last name was Maginley, had sold counterfeit products. The two women were brought before the local club where they admitted their wrong-doing. To resolve the issue, agent Walker was reassigned to run the local supply station for agents in order to disrupt her own distribution ring, and Maginley was made to pledge loyalty to official Walker products only.¹³⁶ Such reprimands seemed mild compared to the offenses, but subsequent disciplinary action was unknown. The episode took a toll on Thompson, who lamented to Ransom, “I am thinking of resigning from the presidency.... You are aware of the many perplexing problems existing in Philadelphia. I feel I can better solve these problems as a lay member chair, than by occupying the President’s chair.”¹³⁷ Thompson’s ultimate decision is unclear, but her challenges continued as Walker, the rogue agent, disregarded agreements made with her related to the operation of the local supply station, and the MCJWMC had logistical

¹³⁴ Deborah Gray White, *Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves 1894-1994* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), 17.

¹³⁵ Margaret Thompson to Freeman B. Ransom August 9, 1917, Box 9, Folder 2, MCJWP.

¹³⁶ Margaret Thompson to Freeman B. Ransom, September 25, 1917, Box 9, Folder 2, MCJWP; Margaret Thompson to Freeman B. Ransom, October 2, 1917, Box 9, Folder 2, MCJWP.

¹³⁷ Margaret Thompson to Freeman B. Ransom, September 25, 1917, Box 9, Folder 2, MCJWP.

problems fulfilling supply orders for agents in Philadelphia, more broadly. In defeat, Thompson bemoaned, “I do know I struggled very hard to build up the club and it is paining my heart to see how things are going.”¹³⁸ The association of Walker agents used the elements of ritual to attempt to address and overcome such inevitable interpersonal conflicts, and continually pointed to Walker’s legacy and the divine for inspiration.

The president continued the meeting by framing the gravity of their position and the challenge at hand by referencing the name and legacy of Madam Walker:

Our task as Madam Walker Beauty Culturists is great and our responsibilities awe inspiring. To falter or fail would not only be a disgrace to all of us, but let the greatest name among modern women, the name of the late Madam C.J. Walker that has been given into our hands to magnify and glorify, trail in the dust. Such undertaking requires the conscious receipt of the aid of the all powerful, all wise, ever present God of our Fathers.¹³⁹

The group then recited the 23rd Psalm together, a religious remembrance of the importance of faith to their endeavors. The chaplain then prayed for divine assistance for the agents in their presentation of themselves as representatives of Madam Walker so that their speech, thoughts, and actions would align with her ethic of service to others and self-improvement, and flow effortlessly and routine as if part of their natural constitution. The prayer concluded by hailing beauty culture as a “divine art” and “a vehicle of divine service” for translating Christian ideals into practice.¹⁴⁰ The members then affirmed this prayer and their unity by reciting the pledge of Madam Walker Agents:

¹³⁸ Margaret Thompson to Freeman B. Ransom, October 2, 1917, Box 9, Folder 2, MCJWP.

¹³⁹ *Ritual*, 3.

¹⁴⁰ *Ritual*, 3.

I pledge allegiance to this club and each and every member thereof, the Constitution and By-Laws of the National Beauty Culturists' and Benevolent Association of Madam C.J. Walker Agents and the Madam C.J. Walker Mfg. Company; and I pledge that the name and fame of the late Madam C.J. Walker shall be carried to higher places by my conduct and that it will never suffer the slightest reflection because of my disloyalty or dishonesty. All of this I pledge so help me God.¹⁴¹

The president would then strike her gavel, declare the meeting open for business, and follow a format issued in the bylaws for handling business.¹⁴² During the conduct of business, the by-laws prescribed that members should adhere to strict silence and remain in their seats without disrupting the “harmony” of the meeting.¹⁴³ The use of vituperative language or even walking across the meeting hall without the express consent of the president was punishable by expulsion. In order to speak, members had to adorn the proper regalia, which was typically a badge representing her rank in the organization.¹⁴⁴

The meeting closed with a striking of the president’s gavel and the singing of the hymn, “God Be With You till We Meet Again.” Then, the president issued a benediction which proclaimed:

We are now about to disband and again mingle with the so-called rough and inconsiderate world. May we leave this body to live among mankind in so far as we are capable of doing in the manner and with the results as did the immortal Madam C.J. Walker. Although she has shuffled off this mortal coil her spirit is with us here and now to lead, guide and inspire us. Unselfishness was the key to her success. It was the Alpha and the Omega of her life.¹⁴⁵

In Christian worship, the benediction served the function of closing out formal services by invoking a blessing upon congregants to protect and guide them as they left the house

¹⁴¹ *Ritual*, 4.

¹⁴² *By-Laws*, 3-4.

¹⁴³ *By-Laws*, 5.

¹⁴⁴ *By-Laws*, 6.

¹⁴⁵ *Ritual*, 4-5; The Court of Calanthe’s ritual ends with the Worthy Inspectrix, the organizational leader, declaring “Alpha and Omega,” see *Ritualistic Ceremonies of the Order of Calanthe* (Chicago: The Fraternal Press, 1914): 59.

of worship to return to their daily lives in the world outside the church. In this practice, the world represented a difficult place that would tempt and stress congregants in ways detrimental to their spiritual salvation and, thus, required divine assistance to navigate faithfully and dutifully. In much the same way, the club's benediction depicted the external world as "rough and inconsiderate," one that required Walker agents' adherence to the "manner" in which Madam Walker herself lived in order to attain the "results" of success. According to the benediction, the hallmark of Walker's manner for living was "unselfishness." Such generosity was then celebrated and taught as the group collectively recited a brief poem entitled, "The Secret to a Happy Life," said to be Madam Walker's motto:

Lord help me live from day to day
In such a self-forgetful way
That when I kneel to pray
My prayer shall be for -----OTHERS.

Help me in all the work I do
To ever be sincere and true
And know that all I'd do for you
Must needs done for -----OTHERS.¹⁴⁶

With the ritual now completed, agents had shared an experience that upheld the values and lifestyle of Madam Walker, bonded them to each other and to these values, and prepared them for continuing the work of using the "divine art" of beauty culture to uplift the race.¹⁴⁷

In addition to these ritual recitations, songs, and pledges, there were strict rules for the handling of money, including no financial transactions without the presence of a quorum (defined as seven members out of ten) and no loaning of funds to individual

¹⁴⁶ *Ritual*, 5.

¹⁴⁷ *Ritual*, 3.

members without the express consent of the national president.¹⁴⁸ To ensure continuity of leadership, officers could not vacate their positions upon the ending of their terms until successors were elected, and successors could not assume their elected office unless in good financial standing with the union. Strict provisions were in place to ensure the voices of members were heard before voting and decision making. Members could be removed from the club following investigation of reports of misconduct, but were given opportunity for a hearing and to confront their accusers. Membership criteria included being an active agent of the Walker Company and “a believer in the Supreme Being.”¹⁴⁹ Members could only belong to one club at a time and had to present withdrawal cards to their first club if they desired to leave and join another. Members were required to pay membership dues of at least \$6 per year, and in return, gained access to sick benefits should they become incapacitated.¹⁵⁰ The by-laws prescribed a moral code that prohibited intoxication and profane language at meetings as well as the improper use of funds.

Each club had a general fund and a burial fund department. The general fund was comprised of fees, dues, fines, donations, and interest, and it was designated for general expenses, payment of sick benefits, payment to members in need, and capital investments, such as hall maintenance.¹⁵¹ The Burial Fund Department administered payment of burial benefits to families of deceased members, and monitored member eligibility for such benefits which would not be paid if dues were in arrears.¹⁵² For the

¹⁴⁸ *By-laws*, 29.

¹⁴⁹ *By-Laws*, 23.

¹⁵⁰ The *By-Laws* guaranteed that sick benefits would not be less than \$1 per week, but did not prescribe an upper limit on payment. See 27.

¹⁵¹ *By-Laws*, 36.

¹⁵² *By-Laws*, 38.

Court of Calanthe, insurance benefits could range from \$300 to \$3000 paid to members' survivors.¹⁵³ It is not clear what amounts were paid out by the Walker clubs.

Charity played a special role in the clubs as it bonded club members together and to their communities. Clubs conducted a range of charitable works in order to support their communities and uphold Madam Walker's reputation for, and later legacy of, giving. In keeping with the broad-based nature of African American philanthropy, the clubs' giving took on many forms. Some clubs held events to raise money for community organizations, went Christmas caroling, and purchased soap for poor families. Some clubs held revue events to raise money to purchase food and other items for Christmas baskets for poor families. Some pledged gifts to the NAACP, while others provided educational programs on health and business development. Still other clubs cared for the sick and elderly, supported students, paid housing costs for poor families, and provided furniture to black colleges. During her lifetime, Madam Walker encouraged agent generosity by recognizing the most active clubs with monetary prizes. She put much thought into the prizes she awarded the agents. In preparation for the 1918 national convention, she set aside \$1,000 to be distributed as multiple awards to inspire more agents and clubs to engage their communities "in order that more people might be benefited." Further, she intended to recognize the club that performed the "most charity work" as well as clubs whose members gave one penny per day for charitable purposes.¹⁵⁴ This practice of recognizing club charity work continued after Walker's death as a key feature of national meetings.

¹⁵³ Luther E. Hall, III., *Rochelle Court #14 Order of Calanthe Record, 1906-1933* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 2011), 3.

¹⁵⁴ *Walker News* 2, 2, December 1928, MCJWP; *Walker News* 2, 1, November 1928, MCJWP; *Walker News* 1, 5, March 1928, MCJWP; *Walker News* 1, 6, April 1928, MCJWP; *1924 Yearbook and Almanac*

The benefits of fraternal membership for white men had included local and national networking, sickness and burial insurance, charity, social cohesion, and stability, all of which were important in a rapidly changing urban, industrial landscape.¹⁵⁵ The same benefits accrued in black fraternal organizations as well as others.¹⁵⁶ As demonstrated by the by-laws of the National Beauty Culturists' and Benevolent Association of Madam C.J. Walker Agents, members enjoyed social insurance, social networks, and participated in charity.

Rituals, however, were the hallmark of the fraternal experience. As a fraternal organization, the national Walker agents' association used ritual to nurture the identity of Walker agents by creating a sacred and secure space whereby they could distinguish themselves from agents affiliated with other companies. Here, Jason Kaufman's concept of "competitive voluntarism" is useful because other companies, such as Poro and, later, Apex, also organized their agents into associations and represented a constant membership-poaching threat.¹⁵⁷ However, none of those competitors were affiliated with the national, or even international, legacy of Madam C.J. Walker, whose memory was palpable among African Americans in the 1920s. It became the basis for agent bonding. The pride and identity of being a Walker agent were celebrated and the concomitant responsibility to serve others reinforced through fervent prayer to God for direction and

(Indianapolis, 1924), 21, BRBML; Madam Walker to Freeman B. Ransom, January 14, 1918, Box 1, Folder 8, MCJWP.

¹⁵⁵ Mark Carnes, *Secret Ritual and Manhood in Victorian America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989).

¹⁵⁶ Theda Skocpol, Ariane Liazos, and Marshall Ganz, *What a Mighty Power We Can Be: African American Fraternal Groups and the Struggle for Racial Equality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006),

¹⁵⁷ Jason Kaufman, *For the Common Good? American Civic Life and the Golden Age of Fraternity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 7. Kaufman coined the term "competitive voluntarism" to describe how voluntary associations, particularly fraternal orders, competed against each other for members, resources, influence, and standing.

through invocation of Madam Walker. While the rituals of the national association were not necessarily as elaborate, ornate, or extensive as those of many black and white fraternal organizations, they served the important function of building social cohesion between the agents and inculcating religious values and Madam Walker's ethic of service and philanthropy. Freeman B. Ransom had originally suggested organizing the clubs after the fraternal model. Although Madam Walker initially rejected the idea, it eventually won out as did much of Ransom's professional advice to Walker.

Freeman B. Ransom, De Facto Philanthropic Advisor

Philanthropists not only redistribute their capital resources to create desired effects in society, but they also invest resources—certainly capital, but especially human—to render their giving manageable. Having noted the extraordinary physical and mental toll formal gift-making had taken upon them, many of the well-known industrial philanthropists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries relied upon key advisors and agents to guide and administer their benevolence. John D. Rockefeller had Frederick T. Gates. Olivia Margaret Slocum Sage had Robert de Forest. Julius Rosenwald had Edward Rogers Embree. Andrew Carnegie had John Ross, Lord Shaw of Dunfermline, and a complex of boards to advise his giving, and three personal secretaries—James Bertram, Robert Franks, John Poynton—to process some 400 to 700 solicitations received by mail daily. Madam C.J. Walker was no different. She had Freeman B. Ransom.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁸ Ron Chernow, *Titan: The Life of John D. Rockefeller, Sr.* (New York: Random House, 1998); Ruth Crocker, *Mrs. Russell Sage: Women's Activism and Philanthropy in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006); Peter Ascoli, *Julius Rosenwald: The Man Who Built Sears, Roebuck and Advanced the Cause of Black Education in the American South* (Bloomington:

Unlike the “philanthropoids” specifically hired by the aforementioned philanthropists to run charitable foundations or manage daily activities associated with charitable giving, Ransom was not initially hired to do philanthropy.¹⁵⁹ He was hired to run the MCJWMC as general manager and legal counsel. However, as a result of the manner in which Madam Walker operated, Ransom’s oversight of her philanthropic giving came as a natural extension of his original charge. The close personal and professional relationship between Walker and Ransom created a bond of loyalty that Walker fully trusted and relied upon until her death in 1919, and that Ransom continued to honor and uphold until his own death, some 28 years later. Ransom did not simply write the charitable gift checks as directed by Madam Walker, he protected and advised her—with both enthusiasm and caution—so she could achieve her goals and not outspend her resources. Just as Ransom helped Walker give form and organization to her business, he gave order to her philanthropic giving. Her philanthropy became documented and institutionalized largely because of the efforts of Ransom, a fact echoed in his obituary: “As a result of his great leadership, the Madam C.J. Walker Manufacturing Company did more than just make money, pay high salaries and build great buildings. It gave thousands of dollars for Y.M.C.A.’s, Y.W.C.A.’s, churches, schools and scholarships.”¹⁶⁰ As the obituary indicated, Ransom was central to the MCJWMC’s pursuit of its commercial and philanthropic goals.

Indiana University Press, 2006); and Joseph Frazier Wall, *Andrew Carnegie* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989).

¹⁵⁹ “Philanthropoids” is Ben Whitaker’s term for philanthropic foundation professionals. See Ben Whitaker, *The Philanthropoids: Foundations and Society* (New York: Morrow, 1974).

¹⁶⁰ Obituary, Box 6, Folder 6, MCJWP.

Freeman B. Ransom was born in Grenada, Mississippi, in 1882. In 1908, he graduated from Walden University, formerly Central Tennessee College, in Nashville. Ransom followed up his study of law at Walden with two terms in law at Columbia University in New York. He came to Indianapolis, Indiana, in 1910 and established a law office. One year later, he was admitted to the Marion County Bar and he would become a prominent African American citizen of Indianapolis over the next four decades. In 1915, the *Indianapolis Freeman* newspaper described Ransom as “the only colored corporation lawyer in the state,” who had also provided counsel for the local NAACP, the Frederick Douglas Life Insurance Association, the Colored YMCA, Dr. Perkins’ Foot Soap Manufacturing Company, and for several private individuals whose estates he tended.¹⁶¹

Throughout his life, Ransom was a race man “identified with movements for the betterment of his people.”¹⁶² He was very active in serving and providing leadership for many civic and philanthropic institutions in the Indianapolis community. He was a member and trustee of Bethel A.M.E. Church. He was an avid Mason and held leadership positions in fraternal organizations such as the Knights of Pythias—the parent lodge of Madam Walker’s Court of Calanthe—and the Sisters of Charity #1. He served as president of Flanner House, an African American settlement house in Indianapolis, and served on its board for much of his adult life. He served on the local boards of the Alpha Home for Colored Folks and the Senate Avenue YMCA, both favorite charities of Madam Walker. He chaired the Management Committee of the Senate Avenue YMCA as well as the building committee that oversaw construction of the Phyllis Wheatley YWCA in 1929. Ransom also led the fundraising campaign that retired the debts of these two Y

¹⁶¹ Obituary, Box 6, Folder 6, MCJWP; “F.B. Ransom, Indianapolis,” *Indianapolis Freeman*, December 25, 1915.

¹⁶² Ransom Press Release, Box 6, Folder 2, MCJWP.

institutions. Politically, Ransom served as president of the 5th Ward Republican League and was elected to the Indianapolis City Council in the 1930s.¹⁶³ In 1918, when Walker determined that she could no longer effectively fulfill all the responsibilities she had assumed, she made provisions for Ransom to leave his legal practice and run the company full time.¹⁶⁴ He continued to run the company for many years after her death and managed affairs for Walker's successor, her daughter A'Lelia, who had little interest in or acumen for the task.¹⁶⁵ After Ransom's death, his long-time friend and legal associate, Robert Brokenburr, succeeded him as head of the company, and Ransom's daughter would later hold leadership positions, too. Ransom's life and career were distinguished by a commitment to his community, which started with his work for Madam Walker.

In a 1931 letter to a reporter for the *Inter-State Tattler* black newspaper working on a story about the MCJWMC, Ransom fondly remembered Walker as “a woman with wonderful ideas.” Ransom first met Walker six months after starting his practice in Indianapolis, at a time when, in Ransom's own words, Walker “was struggling to get a foundation. At the time she was taking in roomers, cooking for them, manufacturing her own preparations in a back room, then doing heads in another room for the rest of the day; she did her washing at night.”¹⁶⁶ Ransom experienced Walker as a driven, resourceful, workhorse visionary, who, in frenetic fashion, used every means possible—from taking in boarders to cooking and cleaning for them—to generate capital to advance her fledgling business. She knew she needed more to make her company thrive and she

¹⁶³ Ransom Press Release, Box 6, Folder 2, MCJWP; Ransom Obituary, Box 6, Folder , MCJWP.

¹⁶⁴ Freeman B. Ransom to E.T. Rouzeau, September 25, 1931, Box 6, Folder 1, MCJWP.

¹⁶⁵ Freeman B. Ransom to E.T. Rouzeau, September 25, 1931, Box 6, Folder 1, MCJWP.

¹⁶⁶ Freeman B. Ransom to E.T. Rouzeau, September 25, 1931, Box 6, Folder 1, MCJWP.

began seeking out the professional expertise necessary to be successful. She first had engaged Ransom to legally incorporate her business and draft contracts for employing sales agents. From there, his counsel to her extended to all matters professional and personal, from managing her corporate finances to filing her divorce papers.

If Walker was the workhorse visionary with big dreams and ideas, Ransom was the pragmatic translator of those dreams and ideas into organizational form. Of his role in the MCJWMC, Ransom wrote, “I think I helped most in shaping those ideas for her, in putting a good number of things into legal form, in reorganizing her bookkeeping system—or rather, establishing a bookkeeping system for her; in protecting her from the unscrupulous of all types and kinds.”¹⁶⁷ He formalized, systematized, and routinized the details of Walker’s dreams and ideas so they could be implemented and managed appropriately. The record of Walker and Ransom’s mail correspondence during Walker’s extensive periods of travel revealed the kinds of assignments Walker gave to him and the activities upon which he advised and reported back to her. He processed the contracts of new agents, developed stereopticon slides for her presentations, scheduled her travel itineraries, created advertising content and strategies, negotiated contracts with vendors, recorded and fulfilled charitable gift pledges, updated and managed product inventories, hired and terminated personnel, managed payrolls and compensation reviews, maintained all financial records and forecasted budgets, monitored agent performance, and followed up on business referrals from Walker and others. Through all of his contributions, Ransom emerged as Walker’s primary, trusted advisor whose influence was particularly felt in his roles as financial manager and protector, which provide significant insight into how the MCJWMC achieved its commercial and philanthropic goals.

¹⁶⁷ Freeman B. Ransom to E.T. Rouzeau, September 25, 1931, Box 6, Folder 1, MCJWP.

Ransom had a large job in managing Madam Walker's finances. In this role, he completed many routine duties such as tracking receipts and expenses, making payroll, balancing the books, forecasting budgets, producing reports, and managing relations with banks and vendors. However, the challenges associated with his responsibilities were exacerbated by Walker's extensive travel schedule and exorbitant spending.

Walker had travelled for several months at a time demonstrating her products, recruiting new agents, checking in on existing agents, and speaking for and promoting the company. It was normal for Walker to visit a minimum of twelve cities in five states in fewer than 30 days. For instance, in February 1918, Ransom sent a pending itinerary for March and April visits throughout Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Ohio, and Pennsylvania to Walker while she was completing a tour through Iowa:

Now I hope to arrange your itinerary as far as Chicago on the 11th, Gary on the 12th, Ft. Wayne on the 13th, and then to Indianapolis.... I can arrange for you to run out to Marion, Indiana, and Terre Haute, and from Terre Haute to Indianapolis, and then [sic] you can make Louisville on April 3rd and it appears to me that you ought to go from Louisville to Cleveland, and from Cleveland to Columbus, Chillicothe, and Pittsburgh.¹⁶⁸

Such a frenetic schedule required constant communication between Walker and Ransom. For Ransom, keeping track of Madam Walker's spending was aided by their regular mail correspondence, but urging Madam Walker to spend less and save more was a challenge. Over a two year period, he even engaged Lelia in his personal campaign to convince Madam Walker to be careful. In a series of correspondence from 1913 to 1915, Ransom recruited Lelia for this effort:

¹⁶⁸ Freeman B. Ransom to Madam Walker, February 20, 1918 Box 1, Folder 8, MCJWP.

Madam has just bought six lots in Gary, and a 1913 seven passenger Cole Motor Car. Oh, it's the latest [sic] thing in autos, so you see you are quite an heiress, I want you to join me in urging Madam from this day on to bank a large portion of her money to the end that it be accumulating and drawing interest for possible rainy days. Madam is in a fair way to be the wealthiest colored person in America, I am ambitious that she be just that, you will help me won't you?¹⁶⁹

Lelia's response to him is unknown, and it was unclear whether the letter's appeal to her own self-interest as an heiress had any effect during that time. However, more than a year later, Ransom felt compelled to reiterate and expand upon the argument in relation to Madam's growing interest in moving from Indianapolis to New York and building a large home there:

it will take quite an income to maintain a building of that kind and in the style that your mother lives, there are those who say live while you are living, but I can imagine no greater disgrace than to be known as your mother is known, and in the end give your enemies a chance to rejoice in the fact that you died poor, this of course, will never be if Madam's business keeps up, but who knows that it will keep up. You must therefore join me in urging that Madam not move to New York until she has paid all debts, I mean present debts, and piled up a snug sum for rainy days.¹⁷⁰

Despite these early arguments, Ransom's challenge in reining in Madam's spending continued, and so did his campaign. Less than a year later, Lelia closed a business correspondence with a postscript that read: "I think mama will be careful in her spending."¹⁷¹ It is not clear what specifically prompted this statement, but Ransom was determined to protect Walker's present-day solvency and long-term legacy. But even Lelia had her limits and frustrations. Three years later, after Madam Walker completed the move into her newly-built palatial estate, Lelia noted for Ransom, almost with a sense of exasperation, "You know mother is a very reckless spender, far more so than I am. She

¹⁶⁹ Freeman B. Ransom to Lelia Walker Robinson, May 27, 1913, Box 4, Folder 6, MCJWP.

¹⁷⁰ Freeman B. Ransom to Lelia Walker Robinson, November, 20, 1914 Box 4, Folder 6, MCJWP.

¹⁷¹ Lelia Walker Robinson to Freeman B. Ransom, July 30, 1915, Box 4, Folder 7, MCJWP.

spends \$20.00 here, \$15.00 there, etc. not realizing how much she is spending. She orders things like a drunken sailor, and when I tell her she has spent a lot of money she is shocked.”¹⁷² It was no small task for Ransom to manage company finances with a spender like Walker at the helm.

Additional difficulties surrounding Walker’s spending emerged from her use of the company as her personal and business accounts. As George S. Olive, an Indianapolis accountant, noted in an audit report of Walker’s estate in 1919, “It was the custom of Mme. Walker during her life time to withdraw funds from the Company without any formal action on the part of the Board of Directors. Instead of declaring dividends on the stock of the Company and then paying such dividends from the Company’s funds, Mme. Walker withdrew money at her own pleasure.”¹⁷³ Upon receipt of a letter sent to him by Walker while she travelled, Ransom never knew what to expect. In one instance, she asked him to quickly send \$200 because her host had made no plans for her arrival.¹⁷⁴ In another letter, she reported, “Have just drawn a check for \$100.00 on the Fletcher [bank account] to the order of Palmer Memorial Institute at Sedalia, N.C. Charlotte Hawkins Brown’s school.”¹⁷⁵ In still another letter, she reported, “Am sending to Mrs. Robinson a check for \$50 to distribute to my charities in St. Louis.”¹⁷⁶ Many such instances abound in their correspondence, for personal, business, and charitable expenses.

After years of such exchanges, Ransom must have had enough because he put her on a \$1,000 per month budget in January 1919 and urged her to observe it.¹⁷⁷ Walker

¹⁷² Lelia Walker Robinson to Freeman B. Ransom, May 18, 1918, Box 4, Folder 10, MCJWP.

¹⁷³ George S. Olive to Freeman B. Ransom, September 15, 1919 Box 27, Folder 3, MCJWP.

¹⁷⁴ Madam Walker to Freeman B. Ransom, March 2, 1918 Box 1, Folder 9, MCJWP.

¹⁷⁵ Madam Walker to Freeman B. Ransom, December 12, 1918, Box 1, Folder 14, MCJWP.

¹⁷⁶ Madam Walker to Freeman B. Ransom, December 19, 1918 Box 1, Folder 14, MCJWP.

¹⁷⁷ Freeman B. Ransom to Madam Walker, January 17, 1919, Box 1, Folder 15, MCJWP.

must not have liked this restriction and offered a counter amount because two weeks later, Ransom wrote to her, "I am afraid that the business is of such that it will not stand for such amount." However, not wanting to risk further ire from his boss but still trying to remain firm, Ransom offered a compromise, "I am getting out my monthly report as well as having book [sic] balanced and what I shall do is to send you every cent that can be spared after I see just what the situation is."¹⁷⁸ While Walker's constitution and inclination to consume made it difficult for her to abide by Ransom's advice regarding her personal spending, she heeded it in matters of business and philanthropy because she trusted him and knew he had her best interests at heart, as evidenced by her later making provisions for Ransom to lead the company after her death.

On numerous occasions, Ransom's advice helped to protect Walker from what he perceived to be unscrupulous people and organizations she would have done best to leave alone. In 1918, when Madam Walker sent him a solicitation letter from the National Race Congress, Ransom admitted that he knew little about the organization, but recommended she instead continue her support of the NAACP because of its reputation and focus, as well as his preference for it over newer organizations.¹⁷⁹ When Madam Walker's mail became overridden with solicitation letters from individuals and organizations, Ransom became the point person for reviewing and determining which to respond to and which to discard. Office staff had strict protocols for directing such mail to Ransom and keeping it away from Walker, so she would not be overwhelmed.¹⁸⁰

As the person who minded the business, its markets, and its brand while Walker travelled, Ransom was also keenly aware of protecting Walker's reputation. While he

¹⁷⁸ Freeman B. Ransom to Madam Walker, February 1, 1919, Box 1, Folder 16, MCJWP.

¹⁷⁹ Freeman B. Ransom to Madam Walker, December 24, 1918, Folder 1 Folder 14, MCJWP.

¹⁸⁰ E.D. Thomas to Mrs. Blackwell, November 21, 2918. Box 9, Folder 4, MCJWP.

regularly directed questionable characters and business interests away from Walker and the company, he also directed Walker herself away from specific entanglements. His protective tendencies were most evident in correspondence related to Madam Walker's support of and participation in a group named the International League of Darker Peoples (ILDP).

Walker had a history of convening race leaders and community members to address matters of racial uplift, and the ILDP was another example. In 1912, Walker had invited friends, including women from the Equal Suffrage Association of Indiana, to her Indianapolis home to discuss a proposal to create a permanent fund that would provide aid to the poor and homeless during the winter. An organization was reportedly established during the meeting with Walker announced in the newspaper as its president and Ransom as its secretary.¹⁸¹ In 1914, Walker hosted a group of women and girls at her home who were interested in forming a local YWCA in Indianapolis.¹⁸² In 1915, Walker hosted Eliza Peterson, a black woman from Texas who was head of the Colored Division of the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), at her home. Peterson organized fifty children into a group called the Walker Loyal Legion—a play on WCTU's typical practice of forming legions of youth around the country to inculcate and invoke their commitment to Christianity and temperance—who signed WCTU's pledge not to consume alcohol or tobacco during their lifetimes and to never take the Lord's name in

¹⁸¹ "Will Look to the Needs of the Poor and Homeless during the Winter Months," *Indianapolis Freeman*, September 14, 1912, 12, MCJWP. It is not clear if the organization ever in fact was created or what may have happened to it.

¹⁸² "In Club Circles," *Indianapolis Recorder*, December 12, 1914, p. 2.

vein.¹⁸³ After she had moved to New York, her interest in convening increased as her mansion became the site for numerous meetings for organizations, including the ILDP.

The ILDP was an organization Madam Walker helped to start that focused on organizing African Americans to protest imperialism in Africa and to connect the African American struggle for liberation with similar struggles throughout the African diaspora.¹⁸⁴ It was part of increasing black organizational efforts to place white supremacy on a global policy stage in view of frustrating domestic events, such as the 1917 East St. Louis race riots, and President Woodrow Wilson's World War I foreign policies which sought to put Europe's affairs in order while neglecting America's treatment of blacks.¹⁸⁵ The ILDP involved prominent individuals like Marcus Garvey, Rev. Adam Clayton Powell, Sr., and A. Phillip Randolph, and Walker was elected its first Treasurer. However, its policy agenda and membership roster concerned Ransom because of the potentially detrimental effects of involvement for Walker, personally and professionally. First, Ransom appeared to have a bias towards the NAACP that may partially explain Walker's continuing support of the organization. Ransom felt that blacks needed to support one organization, namely the NAACP, so concerted effort could be brought to bear on the problems facing the race. For Ransom, there were too many organizations seeking attention, and they served to dilute extant energy and support. Second, he thought Madam Walker's usefulness to the race would be diminished if she

¹⁸³ "National Organizer W.C.T.U.," *Indianapolis Recorder*, January 23, 1915, p. 1.

¹⁸⁴ Tiffany Gill, *Beauty Shop Politics: African American Women's Activism in the Beauty Industry* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 58.

¹⁸⁵ For discussion of the international efforts of black organizations and black clubwomen, see Yuichiro Onishi, "The New Negro of the Pacific: How African Americans Forged Cross-Racial Solidarity with Japan, 1917-1922," *Journal of African American History* 92, 2 (Spring, 2007): 191-213; Michelle Rief, "Thinking Locally, Acting Globally: The International Agenda of African American Clubwomen, 1880-1940," *Journal of African American History* 89, 3 (Summer, 2004): 203-222.

affiliated with too many organizations. But, Ransom's dislike of the ILDP was even more involved and resulted from its socialist leanings and positions on immigration.

Upon reviewing the ILDP's policy agenda, Ransom remarked to Walker that most of its positions were "impractical, revolutionary, and foolish." The organization's position on immigration drew Ransom's particular criticism. According to Ransom, ILDP advocated for an open immigration policy in the United States with little regulation so that anyone could come and go as they pleased. Ransom warned Walker against such a policy because of his belief that it would only erode the base of support for black businesses by introducing more competition from skilled and unskilled white immigrants, who by virtue of their skin color, would be given preference in the labor markets over black workers. According to Ransom, the resulting effect would be increased unemployment and discrimination for blacks, which would decimate Walker's own customer base and collapse her company, specifically, and black businesses, more broadly.¹⁸⁶

After Walker sent him a list of individuals affiliated with the ILDP organization, he dramatically noted, "I have not written you on this matter before today because I have been trying to wait until I could write you calmly." Apparently, the list included the names of individuals Ransom recognized to be problematic for Walker, which caused him great concern. He then pressed, "You must always be watchful lest you be charged with seeking cheap notoriety. We who know you and have learned to love you know that you are not of this type or kind by any means, but the world does not know it and will judge you naturally by your acts and associates." Walker had started holding meetings of the group in her estate in New York and Ransom urged her that "one's home is sacred

¹⁸⁶ Freeman B. Ransom to Madam Walker, January 25, 1919, Box 1, Folder 15, MCJWP.

and it should never be made the place for gathering of theorists, propagandists, etc.”¹⁸⁷

Walker wanted to remain involved with ILDP, but later relented, “I am very much hurt over your opinion of the International League and am sorry now that I had anything to do with it.” She resigned from the organization and continued on with her support of other organizations.

Deborah Gray White has observed that, during this period, black men and black women frequently battled over the best approaches for solving social problems and uplifting the race. Such conflicts led to an internal struggle between the genders. These tensions played out in numerous organizations and publications as leaders, orators, and writers from both genders criticized the other for failing them. According to White, black men attacked black women’s morality and chastity, while black women accused their men of failing to honor, respect, and protect them.¹⁸⁸ While Ransom never attacked Walker’s character, he clearly disagreed with some of her approaches to racial uplift and felt a need to correct them. These disagreements may have been rooted in the larger gender dynamics of the race. As a college-educated man and attorney, Ransom may have felt a responsibility for protecting Walker, who was not only female, but also not formally educated. He may also have seen himself as having a greater capacity than Walker to protect herself and the company because he was male and educated. He

¹⁸⁷ Freeman B. Ransom to Madam Walker, January 25, 1919, Box 1, Folder 15, MCJWP. There was some basis for Ransom’s concern. The Army Intelligence branch conducted surveillance of Walker due to her involvement with ILDP and its efforts to engage Japan and other countries in the African American struggle. ILDP thought it could create unity among the “darker peoples” of the world to fight against discrimination and injustice everywhere, but particularly in the United States. Walker was successful in connecting with publishers of a Japanese newspaper and this raised the concern of government officials who feared the sympathy of foreign governments could be cultivated and be disruptive. For discussion, see Yuichiro Onishi, “The New Negro of the Pacific: How African Americans Forged Cross-Racial Solidarity with Japan, 1917-1922,” *Journal of African American History*, 92, 2 (Spring, 2007): 191-213.

¹⁸⁸ Deborah Gray White, *Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1999), 59.

certainly respected her ideas and her abilities, but he viewed himself as having to bring order to those ideas to keep them manageable. Ransom was dutiful and loyal to Walker, and, whatever their particular gender struggle, a mutual respect existed between the two.

Ransom not only advised and protected Walker, he was her friend, a dear friend who cared deeply for her and invested himself in her success with little demand for attribution.¹⁸⁹ Their bond extended to their families. Ransom's children referred to Walker as "Mother Walker," and she regularly inquired about their wellbeing in her letters. They routinely exchanged gifts on holidays, and, after she moved away to New York, Madam Walker joined the Ransom family for meals when visiting Indianapolis. In December 1918, Ransom captured the nature of their relationship when he wrote to Madam Walker:

When Christmas comes around, I am always reminded of the number of years that I have known you and looking back over your remarkable career, I take a peculiar pride in the fact that I have had the pleasure of watching you develop in business and also your broadening along all lines and then I congratulate myself of having the honor of knowing you and representing you in a small way. I, of course, am writing in the hope that God will continue to smile on you and that you will continue to bless and help the less fortunate.¹⁹⁰

One week later, Walker returned the sentiment: "The little gift from you and Nettie [Ransom's wife] is greatly appreciated and I understand to the fullest degree, all the love that came with it. But best of all, was the really beautiful letter you wrote and which I hope to always keep, as a reminder of an association of which I shall ever be proud."¹⁹¹

The Walker-Ransom relationship was close and personal, focused on matters of business

¹⁸⁹ Freeman B. Ransom to E.T. Rouzeau, September 25, 1931, Box 6, Folder 1, MCJWP.

¹⁹⁰ Freeman B. Ransom to Madam Walker, December 21, 1918, Box 1, Folder 14, MCJWP.

¹⁹¹ Madam Walker to Freeman B. Ransom, December 28, 1918, Box 1, Folder 14, MCJWP.

within a context of mutual love and respect. Their relational chemistry enabled the MCJWMC's dual commercial and philanthropic goals to coexist and thrive.

Conclusion

In 1912, Madam Walker wrote, "I am in the business world, not for myself alone, but to do all the good I can for the uplift of my race."¹⁹² With these words, Walker told us how to view her company. By employing laborers abused and undesired by the white mainstream labor markets, focusing on hygiene as a means for personal development and public pride, providing education to those for whom such was once illegal, and using ritual to bond agents in associations to build a profession and support community, the MCJWMC was simultaneously commercial and philanthropic. These dual characteristics emerged from the broader context of black suffering during the time period, Madam Walker's moral imagination, and Walker's personal and professional relationship with Freeman B. Ransom, who invigorated her ideas. To view one aspect without the other yields an incomplete picture.

As a commercial enterprise, the MCJWMC was established with the same expectations of profit as any business. It had to produce and sell products at a profit in order to exist. It had to navigate a competitive landscape filled with other beauty culture companies focused on the same base of clientele. It also had to exist within the broader context of a white society whose markets, governments, and voluntary organizations were overtly hostile towards African Americans, in general, and black businesses, in

¹⁹² Louis Harlan and Raymond Smock, eds., *The Booker T. Washington Papers, Vol. 11: 1911-12*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 456.

particular.¹⁹³ But, the business of black business has never been just about business.¹⁹⁴ Its philanthropic aspects gave the company meaning beyond commerce and connected it with the broader traditions of black self-help and racial uplift. The MCJWMC employed multi-modal, broad-based approaches for addressing the problems of the race as it simultaneously provided the wealth that funded Walker's charitable support for other black philanthropic institutions working across the country. The commerce fueled and enabled the philanthropic characteristics, and the philanthropic characteristics gave meaning and moral legitimacy to the commercial.

¹⁹³ Juliett E.K. Walker, *The History of Black Business in America: Capitalism, Racism, Entrepreneurship*, 2nd ed., Vol. 1 to 1865 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), xviii-xx.

¹⁹⁴ Cheryl Smith, *Market Women: Black Women Entrepreneurs: Past, Present, and Future* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2005); Juliet E.K. Walker, *History of Black Business in America: Capitalism, Racism, Entrepreneurship*, 2nd ed., Vol. 1 to 1865 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

CHAPTER THREE:

“FOR THE HIGHEST DEVELOPMENT OF THE RACE:”

CONCEPTUALIZING MADAM C.J. WALKER’S PHILANTHROPY

“I am not and never have been ‘close-fisted,’
for all who know me will tell you that
I am a liberal hearted woman.”
–Madam C.J. Walker (1913)¹

Walker scholars have frequently used three historical documents to illustrate Walker’s role as a philanthropist. One document was a letter written in 1914 by Freeman B. Ransom, Walker’s legal counsel, to Ella Croker, a black school teacher from Indianapolis, in which he listed several of Walker’s charitable gifts. The other two documents were Walker’s last will and testament, created in 1917, and the codicil to her will, created in 1919, which both contained charitable provisions. These documents have formed the basis for our knowledge of the size, number, and recipients of some of Walker’s monetary donations. But few scholars have pushed beyond this indexing of gifts approach, in relation to these three documents and others, to determine what else about Walker’s philanthropy may be learned from them.

Madam Walker did not leave behind any known writings that specifically articulated her understanding of her philanthropy. Most of the philanthropy-related documents in the Madam C.J. Walker Collection at the Indiana Historical Society in Indianapolis, Indiana, were gift receipts, gift acknowledgement letters, solicitation letters, and other forms of correspondence between Walker and Ransom in which they discussed

¹ William H. Davis, *Report of the Fourteenth Annual Convention of the National Negro Business League* (Washington D.C.: 1913), 212.

the administration of particular gifts—but no direct or comprehensive statement on her giving. Consequently, any interpretation of Walker’s understanding of her philanthropic giving has to be pieced together from the available records.

As Walker’s legal advisor, Freeman B. Ransom was empowered to write on Walker’s behalf.² He advised and administered her giving. He drafted official correspondence and executed legal documents for Walker. He directly advised her in the drafting of her codicil. In lieu of a direct statement on philanthropy by Walker, a letter about the subject by Ransom and testamentary documents influenced by Ransom, while in dialogue with Walker, serve as the closest approximations available.³ The letter and testamentary documents provide an important record of Walker’s donations, but they also bear witness to Walker’s understanding of her community’s needs, her responsibilities to others, and the most feasible methods for her meeting such needs and obligations. Closer examination of these documents reveals a seemingly inconspicuous yet ultimately discernible way of thinking about philanthropy as a versatile, multi-faceted tool for uplifting the race that gave form to Walker’s giving.

In addition to the philanthropy represented in these documents, another series of gifts made by Walker provided unique insights into her giving. Between 1916 and 1917, Ransom administered donations at Walker’s direction to black industrial colleges to encourage their adoption of her beauty culture training curriculum as a course of study.

² See Chapter Two for a discussion of Ransom’s professional and personal relationships with Walker.

³ Karen Sneddon has noted that the counsel provided by attorneys while advising their clients enables them to produce legal documentation that formally meets the linguistic requirements of the law and substantively presents their clients’ voices; see Karen Sneddon, “The Will as Personal Narrative,” *Elder Law Journal* 20 (2012-2013): 356-410. Ransom drafted the codicil, but it is unclear whether he drafted her last will and testament. While it is highly likely that he did, there was a suggestion that Walker may have consulted another attorney, which may have reflected a response to the potential conflict of interest given that Ransom was named in the will; however, such a concern did not negate his involvement in drafting the codicil. See Madam Walker to Freeman B. Ransom, January 10, 1919, Box 1, MCJWP.

While the initiative did not last long, an analysis of it yields fresh perspectives on African American views of industrial education outside the traditional confines of the oft-referenced Booker T. Washington-W.E.B. Du Bois debates on the subject, and the use of philanthropy by African Americans to promote industrial education.⁴ The motivations behind and benefits of the historical relationship between elite white industrialists' philanthropy and black colleges in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has been problematized and debated by many scholars.⁵ However, Walker's engagement with these institutions and industrial education provides an opportunity for revised analysis of this historical relationship and African American efforts to sustain their own institutions. The initiative reveals much about Walker's core philanthropic values and the steps she took to actualize them.

This chapter presents a conceptualization of Madam C.J. Walker's philanthropy based upon primary source documents created by her closest advisor, Freeman B. Ransom, while he was directly administering her giving to a range of causes and institutions—including black industrial colleges—and in conversation with her about her philanthropic and testamentary wishes. In total, this understanding of her philanthropy covers the final eight years of Walker's life, from just after she had formally incorporated her company in Indianapolis, Indiana, in September 1911 to the series of gifts she made

⁴ W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg, 1903); Booker T. Washington, *Up from Slavery* (New York: Doubleday, 1901); Jacqueline M. Moore, *Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, and the Struggle for Racial Uplift* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 2003).

⁵ James Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); Eric Anderson and Alfred A. Moss, Jr., *Dangerous Donations: Northern Philanthropy and Southern Black Education, 1902-1930* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1999); William H. Watkins, *The White Architects of Black Education: Ideology and Power in America, 1865-1954* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2001).

from her deathbed in New York in May 1919.⁶ This conceptualization reveals much about how her evolving wealth, celebrity, and sensibilities influenced her giving, and hints at what her giving could have become had her life not ended relatively prematurely.

Ransom's Philanthropy Letter

In 1914, Ella Croker, a black teacher and activist clubwoman in Indianapolis, contacted Freeman B. Ransom and asked for a list of Madam Walker's philanthropic giving.⁷ As a public school teacher, Croker was affiliated with Mary Cable, a well-known local black civic leader and school principal who also was a member of Walker and Ransom's church, Bethel AME, and a founder of the Indianapolis NAACP.⁸ Croker's particular intent for the description of Walker's philanthropy is unclear. Ransom replied to Croker's request with a three-page letter on November 19, 1914 which described several types of gifts Walker had made.⁹

As a primary source, the letter was interesting not only for what it contained, but for what it represented. Ransom described the list of donations in the letter as being "more or less chronological" and representative of "some" of Walker's charitable gifts. Ransom started the list with Walker's 1911 pledge of \$1,000 to the building fund of the local black YMCA in Indianapolis. His list represented a diverse sample of gifts made by

⁶ Madam Walker Obituary n.d. Box 3, Folder 10, MCJWP. This document stated, "During the month of May [1919], Madam Walker's private gifts to educational institutions, social and charitable organizations amounted to \$25,000. \$5,000 of this was given to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, as a foundation for an anti-lynching fund." While the document has no date, it was written after May 1919. It is difficult to substantiate the gifts, but the claim was that Walker made several gifts while on her death bed.

⁷ For information about Croker, see Earline Rae Ferguson, "African American Clubwomen and the Indianapolis NAACP, 1912-1914," in *Black Women in Africa and the Americas*, ed. Catherine Higgs, Barbara Moss, and Earline Ferguson (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2002): 80; Ella Croker to Freeman B. Ransom, November 19, 1914, Box 9, Folder 1, MCJWP.

⁸ "Cable House," accessed June 28, 2014, <http://www.iupui.edu/spirit/campus/cablehouse.html> .

⁹ Freeman B. Ransom to Ella Croker, November 19, 1914, Box 9, Folder 1, MCJWP.

Walker over a three-year period. As a result, this letter provided insights into Walker's thinking about philanthropy at a relatively early point in the lifecycle of her business, and at a point in which her experience of acquiring and possessing wealth was emerging. Walker had started selling her own products in 1905 in Denver, Colorado, but she did not incorporate her business until September 1911 after she had moved to Indianapolis. Since the YMCA pledge was made in October 1911, this letter provided important insight into Walker's conceptualization of philanthropy at least through the fall of 1914.¹⁰

Ransom provided the letter to Croker because he felt "that Indianapolis ought to know a little more intimately the life and works of this friend of the poor and needy."¹¹ He offered the letter as a means of informing Croker directly and, perhaps, a broader public about what Walker had done philanthropically. The letter represented standard ways in which Ransom described Walker's giving because the phrasing and examples found in the letter frequently showed up in Walker Company publications and newspaper articles about Walker.¹² The letter illustrated the types of gifts Walker made, the kinds of recipients and causes she supported, and the key motivations for her gifts as reflected in the geography of her giving.

Types of Gifts

Ransom's letter presented several gifts that Madam Walker had made between 1911 and 1914 in narrative form. These gifts can be categorized into four areas, including

¹⁰ Freeman B. Ransom to Ella Croker, November 19, 1914, Box 9, Folder 1, MCJWP.

¹¹ FBR to Ella Croker, November 19, 1914, Box 9, Folder 1, MCJWP.

¹² See "America's Foremost Colored Woman," *Indianapolis Freeman*, December 28, 1912, p. 16; "The Negro Woman in Business," *Indianapolis Freeman*, September 20, 1913, p. 1; "The Life Work of Mme. C.J. Walker," *Indianapolis Freeman*, December 26, 1914, p. 1; Robert Lee Brokenburr, "A Negro Woman's Success," *The Southern Workman* 47 (December 1918): 70-74.

monetary, tangible non-monetary items, employment, and institution-building. Together, these gift categories revealed Walker's sense of the resources at her disposal for philanthropic uses.

The bulk of Ransom's letter focused on the typical category of monetary gifts as philanthropy. Ransom presented twelve of Walker's monetary gifts. Amounts were not given for two of the gifts, but the remaining ten ranged from \$5 to \$1,000, and totaled \$1,550 for the three year period. The \$1,000 gift was the famous pledge to the black YMCA in Indianapolis. It was an outlier on the list because five of these gifts were for \$50 or less, and four were for either \$100 or \$200. However, it was instructive that Ransom led with this gift as it was clear both he and Walker desired for many people to know about it and the significance of not only its amount, but of its source—a black woman who owned a business and used her resources to uplift the race.

Walker had tended to make the gifts of \$50 or less to smaller, locally-based organizations such as Flanner House in Indianapolis, the *Indianapolis Star* newspaper's Star Christmas Fund, the Mite Missionary Society at St. Paul's AME Church in St. Louis, and the St. Louis Colored Orphans' Home. These locally-based organizations were vital to their surrounding communities. Faced with gaps in services created by the discriminatory practices of white mainstream social service organizations, these black-run organizations (except for the Star Fund) were essential to survival in the black community.¹³ In 1916, the *Indianapolis Freeman* reported that Walker had a history of visiting poor families in the city several times per year to “attend to their needs.”¹⁴ Her

¹³ Edyth Ross, *Black Heritage in Social Welfare, 1860-1930* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1978); Joanne Martin and Elmer Martin, *The Helping Tradition in the Black Family and Community* (Silver Spring, MD: National Association of Social Workers, 1985).

¹⁴ “Madam Walker Leaves Scene of Her Labor and Success,” *Indianapolis Freeman*, February 12, 1916.

own private visits to families and public gifts to these charities represented her efforts to combat poverty. Walker appears to have made several small donations to these organizations over time. Such a pattern likely represented her understanding of the importance of continuous support for such vulnerable organizations. A steady stream of smaller gifts better addressed organizations' long term cash flow concerns compared to one-time gifts of larger sums that often left organizations scrambling to find replacement donations after their expenditure.

Walker had tended to make the gifts of \$100 or more to relatively larger organizations with regional, national, or even international scopes. In the case of this letter, such gifts went to Palmer Memorial Institute, which educated students from across the state of North Carolina and the South; the "State University" in Louisville, Kentucky; and the International YMCA.¹⁵ Her \$200 gift to Charlotte Hawkins Brown's Palmer Memorial Institute covered one teacher's salary.¹⁶ The \$100 gift to "State University" was made in honor of Alice Kelly, Walker's tutor, assistant, and frequent travel companion, who had worked as a teacher in Kentucky, and Lucy Flint, Walker's bookkeeper.¹⁷ These gifts were commensurate with those made by white northern donors, and frequently totaled more than given in the aggregate by black donors and southern white donors.¹⁸ These monetary gifts were the most represented type of gift in the letter,

¹⁵ "State University" referred to the State Colored Baptist University/State University in Louisville, Kentucky, which operated from 1881 to 1918. As a black higher education institution, it offered professional degrees in theology, law, and medicine and was supported by black Baptists in Kentucky. The state reference in its title reflected its origins in legislation that created Kentucky's separate, but unfunded public system of schools for blacks. See "Towards Louisville Municipal College" accessed July 3, 2014, <https://louisville.edu/lmc/history1.html>.

¹⁶ "The Life Work of Mme. C.J. Walker," *Indianapolis Freeman*, December 26, 1914, p. 1.

¹⁷ "Madam Walker Leaves Scene of Her Labor and Success," *Indianapolis Freeman*, "February 12, 1916.

¹⁸ See Charles W. Wadlington and Richard F. Knapp, *Charlotte Hawkins Brown & Palmer Memorial Institute: What One Young African American Woman Could Do* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 80. Charlotte Hawkins Brown, the founder of Palmer Memorial Institute, raised \$5,600 from

but they were complemented by examples of non-monetary giving that provided added dimension to Walker's philanthropy.

Walker's gifts of non-monetary, tangible items represented another way in which she had met the needs of individuals and families in her community. Ransom listed five examples of these gifts in the letter. First, there were baskets of food given to the Alpha Home and the Orphans' Home in Indianapolis. The Alpha Home cared for elderly black women and offered them an alternative to the alms house given that white elder care facilities denied admissions to the aged and infirmed blacks. This gift was described by Ransom as having been made annually and valued at \$50. It was consistent with Walker's concern for two of the black population's most vulnerable groups—the elderly and orphans.¹⁹ These gift baskets were the beginning of Walker's ongoing support for Alpha Home, which included chairing a travelogue event in January 1916 after she had returned from travelling on the west coast of the United States. At the event, Walker showed slides of pictures from her trip to the audience members, who had paid 10 cents admission and had a chance to win \$5 in gold from Walker for selling the most tickets. She narrated her slides, which depicted her travels through Missouri, Colorado, Utah, Montana, Washington, and California, and included pictures of the Salt Lake Temple and Cathedral of the Madeline in Utah as well as geysers from Yellowstone Park. The event attracted Eugene Kinckle Jones of the Urban League and other black leaders, as Walker used her travel experiences to raise money and awareness on behalf of Alpha Home.²⁰

donors between 1914-1915 which included less than \$100 each from "African Americans and southern whites" as aggregate groups as well as gifts of \$150 to \$500 from white individuals and county school boards.

¹⁹ For discussion of the vulnerability of black orphans and elderly, see Iris Carlton-LaNey, "Old Folks' Homes for Blacks during the Progressive Era," *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare*, 16 (1989): 43-60.

²⁰ For a description of the event, see "For Sweet Charity," *Indianapolis Freeman*, December 25, 1915, p. 8; "MMe. C.J. Walker's Travelogue a Success," *Indianapolis Freeman*, January 22, 1916, p. 4.

The money from this event was used to clear the Alpha Home's debt, which the local paper described as Walker's final charitable gesture as a resident of the city before moving to New York.²¹ Walker's identification with the plight of orphans, given her own experience of losing her parents before the age of eight, may have greatly informed these gifts and involvement with Alpha Home.

The second gift was described as a "wheeling chair" provided to a disabled elderly man "who had not been out of his door in sixteen years." It is not clear if this individual or his representatives solicited Walker, but she gave him the gift of mobility, something she likely had not taken for granted given the extensive travelling around the country that she did. A third gift was listed as "milk for sick babies," undoubtedly an extension of her concern for the vulnerability of youth. The fourth gift was described as a "ticket" given by Walker to a young man "who was afflicted [sic] with an incurable disease that he might go to his home at Knoxville, Tenn." In closing this letter, Ransom led into this particular gift by classifying it as one of "any number of charitable acts of lesser importance."²² It was unclear whether Ransom was representing his own sentiments or those of Walker, but, given her background, such giving likely held more significance for Walker.

As one who had known the direct generosity of others during her time as a newly arrived migrant in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1889, Walker had depended upon the small, less formal gifts of support, no matter their constitution, to survive and adjust to her new

²¹ "Madame Walker Leaves Scene of Her Labor and Success," *Indianapolis Freeman*, February 12, 1916.

²² Ransom's use of this phrasing may have been an attempt to pre-empt a solicitation from Croker because the volume of requests for assistance to Walker was steadily increasing. Ransom and Walker referred to these requests as begging letters. Ransom would eventually develop an internal office procedure for processing such requests and keeping them away from Walker because she felt stressed by them and had difficulty rejecting them.

surroundings. Additionally, Walker knew the importance of being in the right place at the right time, particularly the place of one's origins, ties, or sense of belonging. At first, desperation sent her from city to city—Delta, Louisiana to Vicksburg, Mississippi to St. Louis, Missouri—in search of better options for living. However, this desperation was replaced by hope and ambition as she had begun travelling in pursuit of her dream and new customers and markets to help fulfill it. This transition was enabled by the range of gifts given to her by the individuals and institutions of St. Louis who had helped her secure food, shelter, daycare and education for Lelia, a church home, and a network of women friends and supporters. Helping a sick young man get “home” when he had no other means for doing so likely was a meaningful act of philanthropy for Walker.²³

In addition to her giving of tangible items, Madam Walker made a non-monetary gift of another sort that was evident in Ransom's description in the letter of her efforts on behalf of an incarcerated young man:

One of the more recent charitable acts of Madam Walker, was the securing of a pardon for the only son of aged parents, who had been given a life term in the Miss., state prison for killing a white man. Madam Walker's aide [sic] was sought by the poor boy's mother early in the fall of 1911....[A] certain Mississippi lawyer was employed and after much expense the pardon was denied December 14, 1913. But nothing daunted Madam Walker [sic] employed an Indianapolis attorney and the boy was pardoned early in August of this year, and the young man is now working supporting his old mother and father.²⁴

The details of this gift were clearly laid out in Ransom's statement about it.²⁵ The more interesting aspect of it related to what Ransom did not mention. The young man who was

²³ Freeman B. Ransom to Ella Croker, November 19, 1914, Box 9, Folder 1, MCJWP.

²⁴ Freeman B. Ransom to Ella Croker, November 19, 1914, Box 9, Folder 1, MCJWP.

²⁵ Ransom may have taken license in describing this gift because other correspondence shows that the pardon had not yet been granted in 1914, the time of his letter. Rather, the pardon was granted sometime between August 1915 and January 1916, as the Mississippi Governor's term was ending and clemency was being granted. See Freeman B. Ransom to Norman Allen, December 6, 1911, Box 9, Folder 1, MCJWP.

incarcerated for murder was Willie Powell, Madam Walker's nephew, the son of her sister Louvenia, who had cared for Walker in her early childhood and adolescent years immediately following the death of their parents. Louvenia asked Walker to assist her son, and Walker obliged by engaging Ransom to secure Norman Allen, an attorney in Mississippi, to pursue a pardon with the governor. Ransom was an excellent advisor to involve in this process as he reportedly had an interest in criminal law and had worked on two other murder cases.²⁶ In addition to Ransom and Allen, Walker may have hired additional attorneys during the five years it took to accomplish her nephew's release, and it was not clear how much she spent on these legal services.²⁷ But the gift's inclusion on this list revealed an interesting facet of African American philanthropy.

Generally, white western models of giving have viewed gifts only to strangers as being philanthropic.²⁸ By focusing on the other-directedness of giving, these western models hoped to distinguish altruistic motivations from legal or sanguinary responsibilities. However, this particular gift by Walker demonstrated the fluidity that has historically defined African American philanthropy in which little distinction existed between gifts to family, friends, and others.²⁹ This quality of African American philanthropy emerged from its West African derivations, its formation in the crucible of American racism, and its orientation toward pragmatism.³⁰ Because of their shared experience of racial oppression based on skin color, African Americans developed a

²⁶ "Freeman B. Ransom," *Indianapolis Freeman*, December 25, 1915.

²⁷ A \$15 travel expense was mentioned shortly before the pardon was granted. But that expense did not encompass the entire effort. See Norman Allen to Freeman B. Ransom, August 31, 1915, Box 9, Folder 1, MCJWP.

²⁸ Robert Payton and Michael Moody, *Understanding Philanthropy: Its Meaning and Mission* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008).

²⁹ Cheryl Hall Russell and Robert Kasberg, *African American Traditions of Giving and Serving: A Midwest Perspective* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Center on Philanthropy, 1997), 11-22.

³⁰ Adrienne Lash Jones, "Philanthropy in the African American Experience," in *Giving: Western Ideas of Philanthropy* ed. J.B. Schneewind (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 153-178.

collective consciousness comprised of a common sense of identity and struggle that tied their liberation to collective effort. W.E.B. Du Bois called this collective consciousness a “double consciousness” based on the “twoness” of simultaneously being American and being black.³¹ For black women, according to historian Deborah Gray White, the dilemma was tripartite, comprised of race, gender, and class which combined into a ternary consciousness.³²

As a result of this shared consciousness and shared status in society, each African American, to the extent that he or she was identified with the black race, was subject to society’s abuse and, therefore, equally in need of liberation. When directing gifts for the purposes of navigating and overcoming the scourge of race, preoccupation with the formal nature of relations between givers and recipients held lesser value in African American philanthropy because African Americans had a broader sense of those to whom they had obligations and maintained responsibilities. The African American concept of extended family or fictive kin expanded the boundaries of the nuclear family to embrace distant relatives and non-related others who were in need.³³ In this context, any form of gift-giving for the purposes of liberation was an act of subversion meant to thwart the status quo and bring about justice in a societal context that was unjust. Emmett Carson has argued that social justice has historically been important to the tradition of African American philanthropy, which operated at three levels to fill voids created by racism:

³¹ W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg, 1903), 3.

³² Deborah Gray White, *Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999).

³³ For discussions of fictive kin in the African American community see Carol B. Stack, *All Our Kin: Strategies for Survival in a Black Community*, (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1975), 58-61; Herbert Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976), 20; Joanne Martin and Elmer Martin, *The Helping Tradition in the Black Family and Community* (Silver Spring, MD: National Association of Social Workers, 1985), 5; Andrew Billingsley, *Climbing Jacob’s Ladder: The Enduring Legacy of African-American Families* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 31.

1) meeting individual and community needs for direct relief from suffering; 2) building self-help institutions to pursue social, cultural, religious, political, and economic needs and aspirations; and 3) creating social change through the abolition of public policies and structural barriers that made America inhospitable.³⁴ In this view, Walker's efforts to free her nephew from the criminal justice system, which had long been unfair and hostile to blacks—particularly black men—can be considered philanthropy. Walker was fond of her nephew Willie and desperately worked to provide him with opportunities. Later, she made specific provisions in her will to further help him get on the correct path. Ransom's listing of her efforts to secure Willie's legal pardon further substantiated the perception of such giving as philanthropic in the African American tradition.

Walker's gifts of non-monetary items revealed her concern for the suffering of others. It is interesting to note that these types of gifts tended not to be publicized as much as some of Walker's other monetary gifts. But they represented an important component of her giving. Walker recognized that there were multiple ways to meet needs. She knew that money was certainly important and vital for the causes she cared about, but she also knew that money could be translated into other forms of giving that would meet felt-needs more immediately and directly. Her gifts of Christmas baskets and Thanksgiving turkeys in Indianapolis became annual affairs deeply appreciated by the local community.

The omissions on the list of items Walker gave as non-monetary gifts to others were equally notable—Walker Company products and services. With a growing manufacturing company and an expanding number of agents around the country, it could

³⁴ Emmett Carson, *A Hand Up: Black Philanthropy and Self-Help in America* (Washington D.C.: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies Press, 1993), 2.

have seemed quite reasonable for Walker to make some portion of products available as gifts to others, perhaps to the women at the Alpha Home or the girls at the Orphans' Home. However, Violet Reynolds, Walker's long time employee, recollected that "One of [Walker's] business quirks was that she gave freely of her time and money, but she was never known to give away any of her products."³⁵ According to Reynolds, Walker was adamant that her goods and services would never be given away as gifts, but rather should always be purchased.

Reynolds attributed this stance to Walker's shrewd understanding of business. She quoted Walker as having said to her, "if any one wants my products, they must buy them. They are for sale."³⁶ The products and services produced the income and resulting wealth that enabled Walker to be philanthropic on an increasing scale. She was clear that the fundamentals of her business model had to be preserved in order for her to continue her work in its totality. While Walker did reduce black women's barriers to entry into the beauty culture profession by occasionally discounting their new agent or course registration fees or by absorbing some of the start-up costs for salons around the country, she was also set to recover these discounts and expenses over time as those agents and salons became profitable. The gifting of products would have reduced inventory, increased the cost of manufacturing, and curtailed revenues. Further, Walker had travelled the country extensively and delivered demonstrations of her products and services to large and small audiences. It is not clear how much product she personally consumed while conducting these demonstrations, but given the frequency of this practice, it is likely that the returns in the form of new agents, new course registrations,

³⁵ Violet Reynolds, "The Story of a Remarkable Woman," page 10, Box 12, Folder 15, MCJWP.

³⁶ Violet Reynolds, "The Story of a Remarkable Woman," page 10, Box 12, Folder 15, MCJWP.

and new customers readily justified it. The return on gifts of product was likely unattractive to Walker because it would have been in the form of good will, something she more readily and easily cultivated through her speeches about her life story and the widespread local and national newspaper coverage of her high profile gifts such as the \$1,000 given to the black YMCA in Indianapolis. Further, the majority of Walker's philanthropy was made prior to legal changes that had begun to provide tax benefits in return to donors, particularly corporations.³⁷ Even still, there was likely more to Walker's steadfast stance on this issue. Giving away products would have only addressed one aspect of her philanthropy, namely her desire to improve the self-image and self-esteem of black women by enhancing their personal hygiene and appearance. Product donations would not have advanced Walker's philanthropic interests in the social service and educational kinds of organizations she supported. But more importantly, MCJWMC products held special symbolism as representations of Walker's dreams of success and a better life. Giving away product donations would have lessened those dreams and diminished the dignity of hard work applied in service to them. And so, Walker's conceptualization of philanthropy did not include her own products as gifts, but she did leverage her company in other ways to be helpful.

In an interesting deviation from the more traditional conceptions of philanthropic giving represented in the letter to Croker, Ransom noted that Walker had given "employment to one woman Eighty Five [sic] years old, to another who is deaf and

³⁷ Paul Arnsberger *et al.*, "A History of the Tax-Exempt Sector: An SOI Perspective," in *The Nature of the Nonprofit Sector*, 2nd ed., ed. J. Steven Ott and Lisa A. Dicke (Boulder: Westview Press, 2012), 126-127. The Revenue Act of 1917 created an individual tax deduction for charitable gifts, and corporations were not able to claim charitable deductions until the Revenue Act of 1936.

dumb.”³⁸ In the first instance, Walker employed a very elderly woman whose age and associated frailty left her outside the labor market. As a woman, she was mainly limited to working in domestic positions, which, by their nature, required physical strength, mobility, and fortitude. While Ransom did not describe the woman’s physical build or labor skills, he implied that her age represented a physical limitation that made her undesirable in the workforce. According to Ransom, Walker also employed a person whom he described as “deaf and dumb” (a common reference to muteness at the time).³⁹ The inability to hear and the associated perceptions of reduced mental capacity imposed upon deaf people likely left this individual with few, if any, viable employment prospects. It is not clear what kind of positions these two individuals were given. In addition to the sales agents, travelling agents, and salon owners employed by the Walker Company, there were also employees who worked in the main office and on the factory floor of the Indianapolis headquarters as well as in the beauty schools. Due to their limitations, these two individuals were most likely placed in one of these latter positions within the company.

By employing the unemployable, Walker made at least two gifts. First, there was the actual job, which was prized in a discriminatory labor market that was hostile to African Americans because of their skin color. Second, there was the dignity that came with being able to support oneself and perhaps one’s family, something Walker had diligently searched for when she struggled as a washerwoman in her earlier days. Effectively, Walker gave these gifts not only to the two individuals listed in the letter, but she gave them all of her employees, specifically, and to African Americans, more

³⁸ Freeman B. Ransom to Ella Croker, November 19, 1914, Box 9, Folder 1, MCJWP.

³⁹ The term has since fallen out of favor and is currently viewed as derogatory.

generally. Walker was one of an increasing number of black business owners who had created job opportunities for African Americans in a society that had few second thoughts about their welfare and no acceptable or meaningful plans for their uplift. This concept of employing the unemployable resonated deeply with Walker as representing a form of justice. Implicit in the idea of not employing people because of certain physical limitations or skin color—characteristics that are natural, genetically-based, and not under the control of any individual—was a sense of unfairness and injustice that needed to be righted. Walker’s gifts in this area were aligned with her overall goal of fulfilling her duty as a black woman to help her race. Her stance contrasted with that of Hetty Green (1834-1916), a wealthy white woman who had turned a multi-million dollar inheritance into a \$100 million fortune through Wall Street investments. Known to have been close-fisted and uncharitable, Green used her provision of jobs as a rationale *not* to engage philanthropy.⁴⁰ As a black woman, such a position was untenable for Walker. Helping others was fundamental to how she understood herself and her responsibilities to her community. She said as much in a 1916 newspaper interview in which she described the rationale for her use of black workers to build her New York mansion: “My business is largely supported by my own people, so why shouldn’t I spend my money so that it will go into colored homes.... By giving work to colored men they are thus able to employ others, and if not directly, indirectly. I am generating more jobs for our boys and girls.”⁴¹ She felt compelled to use the resources at her disposal to be as helpful to her race as possible. Providing employment through her company, and through her personal

⁴⁰ Susan M. Yohn, “Crippled Capitalists: The Inscription of Economic Dependence and the Challenge of Female Entrepreneurship in Nineteenth-Century America,” *Feminist Economics* 12, 1-2 (January-April 2006): 91.

⁴¹ “Madame Walker Leaves Scene of Her Labor and Success,” *Indianapolis Freeman*, February 12, 1916.

consumption, was one way she could give, but doing so did not absolve her from the responsibility to help in other ways. It was part of an array that also included institution-building.

Madam Walker's philanthropic dream was to build an industrial educational institution in South Africa modeled after Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee. Ransom wrote in his letter to Croker that Walker "Established and maintains an Industrial Mission School at Pandoland, [sic] South Africa."⁴² There was no formal record of Walker having started the school at that time or later, but the reference reflected her loyal support of industrial education and a public announcement she had made two years earlier. In her well-known 1912 speech before Booker T. Washington's National Negro Business League's annual meeting in Chicago, Illinois—the one in which she commandeered the floor after being denied recognition by Washington as a speaker—Walker discussed her desire to build an industrial college in Africa. However, she did not simply mention this school as an idea. She announced it as part of the climax of her presentation and revealed it to be a deep yearning:

Perhaps many of you have heard of the real ambition of my life, the all-absorbing idea which I hope to accomplish, and when you have heard what it is, I hope you will catch the inspiration, grasp the opportunity to do something of far-reaching importance, and lend me your support. My ambition is to build an industrial school in Africa—by the help of God and the cooperation of my people in this country, I am going to build a Tuskegee Institute in Africa.⁴³

Following her pronouncement, the hall erupted into a long applause as Walker resumed her seat. More than two years later, significant progress had not been made.

⁴² Freeman B. Ransom to Ella Croker, November 19, 1914, Box 9, Folder 1, MCJWP.

⁴³ William H. Davis, *Report of the Thirteenth Annual Convention of the National Negro Business League* (Washington D.C.: 1912), 155.

Walker's interest in Pondoland, South Africa likely emerged from her membership in the AME Church. Pondoland was located on the Eastern Cape of South Africa near the Indian Ocean. It had a long history as an independent kingdom that survived European colonialism in fair fashion, but suffered related challenges nonetheless. Even legal changes in the early 1900s that gave whites significant ownership of land across South Africa had little effect on the Pondo people who maintained control of their land.⁴⁴ This form of independence may have been the reason for Walker's interest, but so could her religious affiliation. The AME Church had a presence in South Africa since the early 1890s when its bishop visited the country for the first time. In 1896, the Ethiopian Church in Pretoria, South Africa, which was comprised of black South African Methodists who fled the white Wesleyan congregations in the country because of their discriminatory racial practices, united with the AME Church and helped to establish church operations in the country. In 1901, the AME Church established a school named Bethel Institute in Cape Town, South Africa, and deployed missionaries across the country. By 1916, the AME Church's involvement with South Africa grew rapidly to the point where it had claimed to have 18,000 members, 1100 children in schools, 135 buildings, 104 ordained ministers, and 216 preachers and lay helpers in the country.⁴⁵

These numbers included missionaries who had been working in Pondoland since 1898. The AME Church advertised missionary opportunities in South Africa through its publications during the early 1900s and attracted interest. Missionaries on the ground in Pondoland reported vibrant business activity on the part of the local Pondo people, but

⁴⁴ "History of Pondoland, Eastern Cape, South Africa" accessed July 4, 2014, <http://pondoland.org.za/web/>.

⁴⁵ R.R. Wright, Jr. *Centennial Encyclopedia of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* (Philadelphia: Book Concern of the A.M.E. Church, 1916), 287, 288.

they also noted a significant need for schools. In 1900, a Pondo chief named Sigcau donated land to the AME Church for the purposes of building an industrial school. According to church history scholar James T. Campbell, the chief reportedly “urged church leaders to arrange with Booker T. Washington for the immediate posting of a doctor, carpenter, blacksmith, and practical agriculturalist to Pondoland.”⁴⁶ This particular institute was never built, although another institute modeled and named after the AME Church’s Wilberforce University in the United States was built in the Transvaal region of northeastern South Africa some years later. Walker had no known formal affiliation with that institute.

Walker may have learned about Pondoland and its need for education through the AME Church’s extensive international communications network. At the start of the AME Church’s involvement in Pondoland in 1898, Walker was a member of St. Paul’s AME Church in St. Louis. In 1914, the time of Ransom’s letter, both Walker and Ransom were members of Bethel AME Church in Indianapolis.⁴⁷ The church’s missionary work was frequently promoted in its publications and through sermons and announcements. Regardless of the origins of Walker’s idea for building a “Tuskegee in Africa,” it was not in existence at the time of Ransom’s writing. In 1914, Walker spent time on the Tuskegee campus further researching the idea by observing the institute’s classes and operations. In 1916, Walker also offered \$1,000 to black religious denominations, including her own AME Church, to start the school, but there were no takers.⁴⁸ In 1917, Walker made

⁴⁶ James T. Campbell. *Songs of Zion: The African Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States and South Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 199.

⁴⁷ See Chapter Two for a review of the AME Church’s publications, educational activities, and international missions work.

⁴⁸ A’Lelia Bundles, *On Her Own Ground: The Life and Times of Madam C.J. Walker* (New York: Washington Square Press, 2001), 250.

provisions for the school as part of her last will and testament. But her dream of building a school was never realized.⁴⁹

Despite the fact that the “Tuskegee in Africa” vision never became a reality, the inclusion of this aspiration on the list of gifts made by Walker revealed important dimensions of her philanthropy. First, it reinforced her firm commitment to education, as has been demonstrated. Second, it represented Walker’s desire to make a lasting gift by building an institution that would presumably educate South Africans in perpetuity. Scholarships were useful for assisting particular individuals in acquiring their education. Walker knew and valued that kind of individualized support. However, building a school represented an opportunity to not only fill an important gap in much needed services, but to leave a legacy. Much like her own company, which she had set up to endure far beyond her own existence, a school would have stood as a monument to her achievement, as a woman who lacked formal education, and black achievement, as a group once denied the right to learn.

Third, the idea for the school also exemplified Walker’s shifting attention to global matters and an emerging Pan-African sensibility.⁵⁰ In 1913, Walker left the United States to tour Central America and the Caribbean in an effort to open new markets in Costa Rica, Jamaica, Cuba, Panama, and Haiti. While this experience exposed her to the success and achievement of the elite people of color in these countries, it also demonstrated the severe poverty and injustice endured by local people. Particularly, Walker was distressed over the treatment of political prisoners in Haiti and attempted to

⁴⁹ For more information of the handling of Walker’s testamentary provisions for establishing the school in Africa, see the latter half of this chapter which addresses Walker’s will.

⁵⁰ For discussion of Madam Walker’s interest in Pan-Africanism, see Kate Dossett, *Bridging Race Divides: Black Nationalism, Feminism, and Integration in the United States, 1896-1935* (Tallahassee: University Press of Florida, 2008), 118-134.

give food to them to provide some comfort.⁵¹ If nothing else, the experience gave her a broader sense of the troubles facing black-skinned people around the world. Well versed in American racial oppression, Walker finally had seen first-hand something she would have heard about through the AME Church's communications network and her increasing interactions with NACW and the NNBL—that people of color were facing racial discrimination and injustice outside the United States, too, and that while their various struggles around the world were in geographically different locations, they were all connected.⁵² By thinking outside the American context, Walker was beginning to expand her identity with and sense of obligation to others; consequently, her philanthropy was following suit. Her use of gifts of money, tangible items, employment, and institution-building demonstrated her sense of how best to be helpful to important causes.

Recipients and Causes

According to Ransom's letter, Walker made philanthropic gifts to both individuals and organizations. The gifts to individuals tended to address immediately felt-needs that resulted from poverty or other forms of suffering, such as hunger and lack of mobility. The gifts to institutions tended to focus on operational or programmatic emphases that addressed various social injustices. This inclusion of both individuals and institutions in Walker's philanthropy was important because, during Walker's lifetime,

⁵¹ Walker's tour of Haiti occurred prior to the U.S. occupation of the country in 1915.

⁵² For discussion of Walker's international trip, see "Short Flights," *Indianapolis Freeman*, January 3, 1914, p. 2; "Madam C.J. Walker of Indianapolis Seeing the Islands of the Southern Seas," *Indianapolis Freeman*, January 17, 1914. Establishing a school in Africa also represented an opportunity for Walker to open new markets for her products on the continent. Although Walker did not publicly discuss this possibility, her school, if built, would have undoubtedly offered her training curriculum which would have facilitated development of markets by preparing a workforce, much as her beauty schools were doing in the United States.

the emergence of scientific philanthropy as a model for giving became prominent in the United States.

Having started in England in the late nineteenth century with the charity organization movement, scientific philanthropy called for the application of scientific knowledge and methods to eradicate social ills for good.⁵³ Anything else was branded a lesser form of charity, which might have been useful for meeting an immediate need, such as ending the severe hunger of a child who had not eaten in days by giving her food, but offered no long-term significant societal impact because the child would be hungry again the following day; thus, the cycle of need would be perpetuated. Scientific philanthropy became a dominant model in the early twentieth century as it was aided by the emerging philanthropic foundations of the period including the Russell Sage Foundation, Andrew Carnegie's foundations, and John D. Rockefeller's institutions. Among African American organizations, scientific philanthropy's major manifestations were in some elements of the black clubwomen's movement and the National Urban League.

At the local level, some black clubwomen adopted social science methods in their programming, such as Lugenia Burns Hope, who founded the Neighborhood House in Atlanta, Georgia. Hope conducted social science surveys of neighborhood conditions, including housing, health, and sanitation, to inform and measure her organization's planning and programming to meet the needs of one of Atlanta's most impoverished and

⁵³ For discussion of scientific philanthropy see Robert Bremner, *American Philanthropy*, 2nd edition (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), 85-99; Judith Sealander, *Private Wealth & Public Life: Foundation Philanthropy and the Reshaping of American Social Policy from the Progressive Era to the New Deal* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

neglected black neighborhoods.⁵⁴ At the national level, these methods were deployed by the National Urban League and its local affiliates across the country. The League's co-founder and first executive director was Dr. George Edmund Haynes, the first black graduate of the New York School of Philanthropy, a forerunner of social work and a purveyor of the application of social science methodologies to social problems. His sister, Birdye Henrietta Haynes, was the first black graduate of Chicago School of Civics and Philanthropy and applied similar methods in her direction of settlement houses in Chicago and New York.⁵⁵ As a result, the tenets of scientific philanthropy were not lost on African Americans, however, during this historical period of national organizational infrastructure-building to advance the struggle for racial uplift and social progress, African Americans may have had a different interpretation and application of it given their firsthand experience with the severity of their oppression and social needs.

For instance, Iris Carlton-LaNey, a social welfare historian, wrote that black old folks' homes during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries thought about the "worthy poor" differently than did many mainstream white organizations, particularly those influenced by scientific philanthropy.⁵⁶ The notion of the "worthy poor" was used to deny services and assistance to those individuals believed to have had a great hand in

⁵⁴ Jacqueline Anne Rouse, *Lugenia Burns Hope, Southern Black Reformer* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989); Cynthia Neverdon-Morton, *Afro-American Women of the South and the Advancement of the Race, 1895-1925* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989), 145-163.

⁵⁵ Iris Carlton-LaNey, "The Career of Birdye Henrietta Haynes, A Pioneer Settlement House Worker," *Social Science Review*, 68, 2 (June 1994): 254-273; Touré F. Reed, *Not Alms but Opportunity: The Urban League and the Politics of Racial Uplift, 1910-1950* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

⁵⁶ See Iris Carlton-LaNey, "Old Folks' Homes for Blacks during the Progressive Era," *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare*, 16, 3 (September, 1989): 43-60. In their research, Hall-Russell and Kasberg found that "The concept of the 'deserving poor' does not exist in the African-American community as a whole." This may have evolved to be true for African Americans in the twentieth century, but more research is necessary to determine how African Americans have historically viewed worthiness. See Cheryl Hall-Russell and Robert Kasberg, *African American Traditions of Giving and Serving: A Midwest Perspective* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Center on Philanthropy, 1997), 4.

their own downtrodden condition; thus, they were seen as unworthy of resources because their behavior and lack of moral fortitude was believed to be the cause of—or at least the major contributor to—their plight. As a result, no infusion of resources could overcome such innate faults. By virtue of their skin color and the concomitant stereotypes and perceptions that whites imposed upon and associated with darker hued pigmentation, African Americans were automatically deemed unworthy of services by many white social agencies. Black old folks' homes frequently accepted either a good word of reference from a prominent black citizen or membership in a fraternal organization, which typically included social insurance benefits, as proxies for prospective residents' ability to pay for care. Consequently, while black-run organizations had to be prudent in exercising their limited ability to provide assistance, they were more lenient given the broader situation of the race.⁵⁷

Walker was not greatly influenced by scientific philanthropy. She did not apply formulas to her giving. She did not deploy social science methods to assess the scope of needs and inform a strategy to meet those needs. Her giving was rooted in the cultural and identity-based perspectives of the African American experience, generally, and of black women's experience, particularly, which expected all members of the race to help as they were able. To be sure, she was concerned with eradicating the suffering of her race and had no desire for temporary measures that offered no long-term solutions. She wanted racial oppression permanently ended and opportunity expanded for every African American, and for people of color more broadly across the world. But her approach to

⁵⁷ The influence and role of scientific philanthropy in black-run organizations is beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, it represents an area in need of additional research. To be sure, the class conflict inherent among African Americans during this time period reflected the range of biases from the larger Victorian milieu and moral code that informed much of scientific philanthropy. These complexities and nuances, and their specific influences on black philanthropy, need further attention.

philanthropic racial uplift involved supporting black individuals and institutions that were automatically deemed worthy due to the pervasive racial oppression that required a philanthropic response in order to meet basic needs for survival and to advocate and agitate for broader social progress.

For certain, Walker was not foolish in her giving. She admitted her great difficulty in turning down appeals when in 1914 she wrote that public knowledge of her wealth had “caused scores of demands for help. Many of whom are so pathetic that it has been impossible for me to turn them down.”⁵⁸ Ransom had taken steps to ferret out appeals that were bogus or questionable, and was diligent in his role to make sure no one took advantage of Walker’s generosity nor that her benevolence led to problematic alliances that called into question her sincerity or reputation, or the Walker Company’s stability. That said, Walker’s giving was not haphazard; rather, it had focus.

According to Ransom’s letter on Walker’s gifts, there were two main types of organizational causes that Walker supported, education and social services.⁵⁹ The institutions representing education were most obvious and consisted of Hannon Industrial Institute, Tuskegee Institute, Palmer Memorial Institute, and “State University” in Kentucky. The Lomax Hannon Industrial Institute was founded by the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church in 1893 in Greenville, Alabama. In 1912, the approximate time

⁵⁸ Louis Harlan and Raymond Smock, *The Booker T. Washington Papers Volume 13: 1914-1915* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 14.

⁵⁹ Walker seems to have had a philanthropic interest in the arts that began to emerge near the end of her life. Ransom did not include gifts to the arts in his letter to Croker because they seemed to have started shortly after he had written it. According to newspaper reports, she patronized at least three black artists including John Wesley Hardrick (painter), William Edouard Scott (painter), and Frances Spencer (harpist). Spencer turned out to be an imposter who took advantage of Walker’s generosity (see “Another Chapter of the Mme. Walker-Frances Spencer Incident,” *Indianapolis Freeman*, August, 28, 1915). Walker also served on the board of the Music Settlement House, an arts organization in Harlem, New York. However, there is insufficient evidence in the Walker archives to substantiate claims for the overall role of the arts in Walker’s giving. Further investigation is necessary. See “The Life Work of Mme. C.J. Walker,” *Indianapolis Freeman*, December 26, 1914, p.1; “Mme. C.J. Walker Thanks Public for Support,” *Indianapolis Freeman*, February 27, 1915.

when Walker donated a scholarship there, Hannon had 232 students, mainly from Alabama, and an annual operating budget of \$7,360.⁶⁰ In contrast, Tuskegee Institute served as the archetype of black industrial colleges and was greatly favored among white industrialist funders of black education. Consequently, it had boasted an enrollment of 1,527 students from 32 states and 17 countries. It had an operating budget of \$270,568 and an endowment worth \$1.9 million. The exact dollar value of Walker's scholarships at Hannon and Tuskegee is unknown, but according to Tuskegee's annual report in 1914, a donation of \$50 covered the annual cost of tuition for one student. For that same calendar year, Walker was listed in Tuskegee's annual report as having given \$10.⁶¹ Newspaper accounts indicated that at least one of the Tuskegee students supported by Walker was African and his expenses amounted to \$72 per year, which she paid.⁶² Palmer Memorial Institute, located in North Carolina, was led by Charlotte Hawkins Brown and based on her "triangle of achievement" that emphasized education, culture, and religion through its industrial and agricultural curriculum.⁶³ These gifts demonstrated Walker's penchant for education, generally, and industrial education, specifically. As previously argued,

⁶⁰ Henry Willingham, *Annual Report of the Superintendent of Education in the State of Alabama* (Montgomery: Brown & Company, 1911), 316, 320, accessed July 3, 2014, http://books.google.com/books?id=PRgwAQAAMAAJ&pg=PA332&lpg=PA332&dq=Hannon+Industrial+Institute+in+Greenville,+Alabama&source=bl&ots=v468T6hWvU&sig=YymxMX0vYCTm_3WpjSf0ARym9K4&hl=en&sa=X&ei=D4a1U7nnG8e0yASto4CYAw&ved=0CDoQ6AEwBQ#v=onepage&q=Hannon%20Industrial%20Institute%20in%20Greenville%2C%20Alabama&f=false. Hannon eventually became a two-year junior college, but closed in 1984.

⁶¹ Tuskegee Institute, *Annual Report of the President* (Tuskegee: Institute Press, 1915): 5, 8, 13, 165, accessed on July 3, 2014, <http://books.google.com/books?id=2nisVsoT7VQC&pg=PA6&lpg=PA6&dq=Tuskegee+Institute+budget+in+1912&source=bl&ots=pEHGc03ZMT&sig=pxYBcNfbUZyqVuG1SPwlNAvw-ig&hl=en&sa=X&ei=nly1U4q4GMOhyAT34YHYCQ&ved=0CB4Q6AEwATgU#v=onepage&q=Tuskegee%20Institute%20budget%20in%201912&f=false>. In a letter to Madam Walker, Booker T. Washington indicated that students did not pay tuition and that her \$50 donations would cover students' other expenses. However, the annual report lists \$50 as covering tuition.

⁶² "America's Foremost Colored Woman," *Indianapolis Freeman*, December 28, 1912, p. 16; "The Life Work of Mme. C.J. Walker," *Indianapolis Freeman*, December 26, 1914, p. 1.

⁶³ Charles Wadelington and Richard Knapp, *Charlotte Hawkins Brown & Palmer Memorial Institute: What One Young African American Woman Could Do* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 133.

industrial education was Walker's preferred mode and the model upon which she based her company's recruiting, training, and credentialing of agents. The period of giving covered in Ransom's letter represented Walker's initial attempts to cultivate Booker T. Washington's interest in and recognition of her work. Her \$10 gift was one of many sent to Tuskegee, not to mention the multiple gifts of her agents later leveraged to support Tuskegee's Booker T. Washington Memorial Fund after his death in 1915. In 1916, Walker had pledged \$500 towards the fund's \$250,000 goal for African Americans.⁶⁴ She eventually bequeathed \$2,000 to Tuskegee. This estate gift and the smaller gifts to the memorial fund represented Walker's interest in and commitment to industrial education and to what Booker T. Washington represented as a race leader that went far beyond cultivation of Washington's personal favor and attention while alive. It remains unclear how or when Walker met Charlotte Hawkins Brown, but it was common for Walker to support the institutions of her clubwomen friends.

Walker also made gifts to social services. Her gifts to social services focused on the YMCA and the Flanner Guild. Ransom noted in the letter that Walker gave to the black YMCAs in Indianapolis and St. Louis as well as to the International YMCA. Her gifts to the black YMCA in Indianapolis were for the building fund and the general expense fund. Madam Walker was not alone in her staunch and enthusiastic support of the YMCA. Historian Nina Mjagkij has shown that African Americans believed that, despite its discriminatory practices, the YMCA provided black men and boys with "the proper environment, stimulation, and role models to build their work ethic and their

⁶⁴ "Tuskegee Memorial Fund," *Indianapolis Freeman*, March 11, 1916, p. 6.

manhood.”⁶⁵ They viewed the YMCA’s programs as conducive to racial uplift, and leaders within the YMCA movement created a national network of black-operated YMCA associations that served as a source of pride and development within the community. According to Mjagkij, black YMCAs provided important vocational and professional training, literacy and educational services, dormitory housing, recreational and physical activities for black communities. Their facilities became “community centers” and meeting places for black professional, civic, religious, and social organizations that symbolized African Americans’ “search for cultural self-determination.” As independent institutions, the black YMCAs were a source of pride and attracted financial support from the community.⁶⁶ By making her \$1,000 YMCA gift pledge—which almost equaled the total gifts and pledges made by 99 other donors⁶⁷—and subsequent smaller and more regular donations to local, national, and international black YMCAs, Madam Walker expressed the value she placed on the YMCA as a vehicle for uplifting the race and overcoming prejudice. As a multi-faceted organization meeting desperate needs at the local level and internationally, it was a unique institution Walker deemed worthy of support and replication in communities of color across the globe.

The Flanner Guild was an Indianapolis-based community service center founded in 1898 that provided employment, training, social services, recreational programming, health services, child care, and a library. In many ways, it resembled the programmatic array of the YMCA and was focused on meeting the needs of the local black community.

⁶⁵ Nina Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness: African Americans and the YMCA, 1852-1946* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1994), 129.

⁶⁶ Nina Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness: African Americans and the YMCA, 1852-1946* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1994), 84.

⁶⁷ “Colored Subscribers to the Building Fund of the Colored Men’s Branch Y.M.C.A.,” *Indianapolis Freeman*, May 10, 1913, p. 8.

Later known as Flanner House, the organization was part of the settlement movement and figured largely in the local response to a tuberculosis outbreak in Indianapolis. Walker did not establish a pattern of making specific gifts to Flanner Guild, but she continued supporting the YMCAs and social services, more broadly. This particular gift referenced by Ransom in the letter may have been facilitated by his associate Robert Brokenburr and his wife, Alice, who served as superintendent and matron of Flanner Guild, respectively, from 1912 to 1914.⁶⁸ But Walker's relationships were not the only factor that drove her donations. She maintained an affinity for particular locales that represented turning points in her life story.

Geography of Giving

Ransom's letter contained a strong sense of place in terms of the localities to which Walker was drawn to give. There were two primary geographic locations of importance to Walker: Indianapolis, Indiana, and St. Louis, Missouri. The vast majority of gifts contained in Ransom's letter were made to meet needs in Indianapolis, Walker's place of residence between 1910 and 1916 and the headquarters of her company. The YMCA Building Fund gift of \$1,000 in 1911 was for the colored YMCA in Indianapolis. The Christmas baskets were a regular feature of Madam Walker's time in Indianapolis as she had made provisions to distribute the gifts each year. The gifts of Christmas and Thanksgiving turkeys to the Alpha Home (old folks' home) and the orphan home were made in Indianapolis, as was the \$100 annual donation to the YMCA she originally helped to build. The aforementioned Flanner House, which received a \$25 donation from

⁶⁸ "History of Flanner House," Flanner House, accessed July 4, 2014, <http://www.flannerhouse.com/about/History-1946/default.aspx>.

Walker, was located very close to Walker's Indianapolis home and office. Together these gifts represented Walker's interest in uplifting the race through supporting the provision of vital social services for the black community.

Walker chose Indianapolis as her place of residence, in part, because of the warm welcome she received by the local black community during a visit to the city in 1910. She was quickly embraced by locals as a favored daughter of the city, and state, by extension.⁶⁹ In fact, the affinity felt for Walker by the local black community of Indianapolis was represented in a resolution presented to her in 1915 to discourage her from leaving the city to reside in New York after rumors had begun circulating about her potential departure. Signed by nearly 60 YMCA leaders, members, and local civic leaders, the resolution referred to Walker as the city's "daughter," "sister," "comrade," "benefactor," "gracious sympathizer," and "generous mother," and begged her to "always live among us."⁷⁰ The *Indianapolis Freeman* wrote that Walker would be missed not only for her business contributions, but also for her charity as "the big-hearted race loving woman that she is," and many of the individuals personally helped by Walker called her or visited her home to express gratitude before her departure in 1916.⁷¹ Walker greatly appreciated the warm welcome, hospitality, and appreciation even though other experiences, such as her mistreatment by the Isis Theater, which charged her a higher price of admission than whites paid for attending a moving picture show, left her feeling wary of the city.⁷² Nothing, however, would taint Walker's connection to a handful of

⁶⁹ To this day, Madam Walker is considered by many people in Indiana to have been a "Hoosier," the colloquial term for natives of the state of Indiana. She was posthumously honored with many distinctions, including placement of a sign representing her likeness on the Cultural Trail in downtown Indianapolis.

⁷⁰ Resolution from Indianapolis YMCA, 1915, Box 2, Folder 7, MCJWP.

⁷¹ "Madame Walker Leaves Scene of Her Labor and Success," *Indianapolis Freeman*, February 12, 1916.

⁷² Walker ultimately sued the theater for the discriminatory treatment, and never quite felt the same about Indianapolis.

charities that she held dear. Even after she left for New York, the Indianapolis charities remained important to Walker and many received bequests through her estate.

Beyond the obvious ties for being the headquarters of the Walker Company, Indianapolis held significance in her life story. It was in Indianapolis where she had formally incorporated her company and had the first opportunity to establish the kind of roots that had been long missing in her life. Sarah Breedlove was born in Delta, Louisiana, in 1867 and left for Vicksburg, Mississippi, in 1878 as a young child under the care of her sister Louvenia following the death of their parents. Madam Walker later returned to her birthplace in October 1916 as part of a southern promotional tour for her company as she wrote to Ransom: “Went to my home in Delta yesterday and came back to Vicksburg and gave a lecture at Bethel church to a very appreciative audience [sic] going back Wed. night [sic] lecture at Baptist church.”⁷³ While she may have made some impromptu gifts during her visit to her birthplace, as she was known to do during her travels, Walker did not appear to have any further engagement with these cities. Later, in the early days of her business, Sarah also lived in Denver, Colorado, and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. But she did not find those cities conducive to long term relationships and connections. By contrast, she had numerous employees in Indianapolis, Indiana, and very close friends like Freeman and Nettie Ransom, Robert and Alice Brokenburr, and Joseph and Zella Ward.⁷⁴ As a member of Bethel AME Church, Walker was connected to the local black middle-class community and maintained connections with important institutions such as the local YMCA, Court of Calanthe, the NAACP, and the *Indianapolis Freeman* and the *Indianapolis Recorder* newspapers. The Indianapolis gifts

⁷³ Madam Walker to Freeman B. Ransom, October 30, 1916, Box 1, Folder 5, MCJWP.

⁷⁴ Walker employed Ransom and Brokenburr, but also became quite fond of their families. Dr. Joseph Ward was Walker’s physician in Indianapolis and she became close friends with him and his wife.

described in the letter by Ransom represented a depth of connection and sense of place that held great meaning for Madam Walker. While Indianapolis was not where she started her business, it was the place where it thrived and where the return on her laborious efforts first became most evident. Despite the Isis incident which soured her view of the city, Indianapolis remained a place of importance to the Walker brand and to Walker herself, and, to this day, forms the primary basis for her legacy.

Organizations in St. Louis, Missouri, were recipients of a few gifts that represented Walker's deepest sense of identification even though their amounts might not initially hint at their importance. According to Ransom's letter, Walker gave ten dollars annually to both the "colored Orphans Home at Saint Louis" and the Mite Missionary Society of the St. Paul's AME Church in St. Louis. She also gave \$100 annually to the YMCA of St. Louis. As previously discussed, the bulk of Walker's life was spent as a resident in St. Louis, Missouri. Between 1889 and 1905, the transformation that led Sarah Breedlove to become Madam C.J. Walker occurred while she resided in St. Louis. Over the sixteen-year period, Sarah, the twenty-two year old, illiterate, penniless, migrant widow and mother who struggled as a washerwoman to provide for her child, became Sarah, the confident, forward-thinking dreamer who had put her daughter through college and had resolved to leave her washerwoman tub behind in pursuit of her business idea. The charities named in Ransom's letter had a great hand in this transformation. The black orphans' home had provided daycare and education to Lelia. The Mite Missionary Society at St. Paul's AME Church had embraced Sarah, surrounded her with inspiring

black women, helped her become independent, and socialized her into black women's modes of service and charitable giving.⁷⁵

During her extensive travels on business, Walker continued to visit St. Louis and maintained her friendships there. Most notably, Jessie Robinson, who was a member of the Mite Missionary Society that welcomed young Sarah to town in 1889, became a life-long friend. But she was not only Walker's friend. She became an active employee of the Walker Company who ran a local supply station for Walker agents in the city and served as chair of the Rules of Order Committee of the National Convention of Madam C.J. Walker Agents and President of the St. Louis Walker Club.⁷⁶ Beyond these involvements, Jessie was Walker's connection to St. Louis and a facilitator of some of her giving to the city. For instance, in December 1912, Robinson wrote to her friend to give her an update on charities. Robinson told Walker that St. Paul AME Church's new pastor had placed the work of a church auxiliary called the Helping Hand Society under the auspices of the Mite Missionary Society. Then, on behalf of the pastor, Robinson asked Walker for a donation to this effort because "we are doing a wonderful work for humanity."⁷⁷ She also informed Walker of the election of a new board president at the orphan home, a person she described as "a wonderful woman, a good manager, honest and upright."⁷⁸ Robinson noted that the new president was working hard on the Christmas bazaar fundraising event and provided her address to encourage Walker's donation. This was a unique relationship that kept Walker connected to a special place in her life.

⁷⁵ See Chapter One of this dissertation for review of Walker's experiences in St. Louis and the specific roles of these organizations in her life.

⁷⁶ *Madam C.J. Walker Manufacturing Company Yearbook and Almanac 1929*, p. 22.

⁷⁷ Jessie D. Robinson to Madam Walker December 9, 1912 Box 1, Folder 1, MCJWP.

⁷⁸ Jessie D. Robinson to Madam Walker December 9, 1912 Box 1, Folder 1, MCJWP.

In a 1912 newspaper interview, Walker told a reporter that she gave to the orphanage in St. Louis “in remembrance of the kindnesses that were shown her own daughter there,” and that she gave to the programs of the St. Paul AME Church because “she was converted” there—a reference to her personal and religious transformation.⁷⁹ Her continued support of St. Louis-based charities represented her remembrance of those people and organizations that had helped her, and her identification with the effective local efforts that worked to change lives. Her gift to the local YMCA became an extension of this identification as one who already valued the YMCA’s presence in Indianapolis and wanted to see it also thrive in St. Louis.

Together, Indianapolis and St. Louis, two Midwestern cities in which dramatic developments occurred in Walker’s life, received the bulk of her gifts between 1911 and 1914 as recounted by Ransom in the letter. This pattern continued in subsequent years and was also maintained through the bequest provisions Walker made through her estate. The letter also mentioned gifts to some black schools across the South. On the whole, Walker’s affinity for Indianapolis and St. Louis explained a great deal of her giving and how she expressed her sense of identity and responsibility in her specific efforts to uplift the race.

Ransom’s letter presented important dimensions of Walker’s philanthropy during this period in her life in which her company was firmly established and her wealth and reputation were on the rise. It took form through multiple channels that included monetary gifts, but also non-monetary support, employment, and institution-building. It supported black organizations and black individuals in desperate need and emerged from Walker’s sense of obligation to be a race woman who served her community. Walker’s

⁷⁹ “America’s Foremost Colored Woman,” *Indianapolis Freeman*, December 28, 1912, p. 16.

philanthropy was largely focused on education and racial uplift via social services, and was directed into communities to which Walker had a special connection or across the South, more broadly. Overall, Ransom's letter revealed Walker's philanthropy to be practical and versatile, qualities that continued to play out in Walker's special initiative to partner with black colleges.

Gifts to Black Colleges

When it came to supporting black colleges, Madam Walker funded scholarships at institutions like Tuskegee, but she also made gifts for curriculum and facility renovation based on a specific proposal she believed would support the educational missions of the institutions, build the credibility of beauty culture as a profession, open new markets, attract agent recruits, and generate income for both the institutions and the Walker Company. On March 27, 1917, Madam Walker mailed a batch of letters to several black colleges in the South introducing the proposal. Based on "great demand for beauty culture among our people" for both personal beautification and employment purposes, Walker had proposed that the colleges offer her hair-growing curriculum as a course of study. Walker sought to establish beauty culture "as an industry, as we believe the proper care of the scalp and hair adds much to the personal appearance of the individual, and is as necessary as the training of the mind and development of the body." The course was entitled "The Art of Hair Growing" and Walker informed the colleges through her letter that it was already established at Tuskegee Institute, Roger Williams University, and Wiley College.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Madam Walker to Normal Industrial & Agricultural College of Pensacola, Florida, March 27, 1917, Box 1, Folder 7, MCJWP.

To encourage their adoption of her curriculum, Walker offered the schools \$100 donations to renovate and furnish rooms that could serve as clinical laboratories for the training program. Walker asked that the labs be furnished in white, in keeping with her own practice for salons, and prescribed a list of necessary equipment, including oak dressing tables, mirrors, and other articles. To staff the course, Walker asked the colleges to incur the travel expenses and \$40 registration fee to send a representative to Lelia College in New York City in order to be trained in manicuring, massage, and other hair preparation techniques of the Walker method. In return for the fee, the representative would receive instruction, a uniform, a steel comb for use in the lab, and 18 boxes of Walker products to get started. Additional products would then be available at the wholesale rates paid by Walker agents.⁸¹ It is not known how many colleges Walker contacted, but before the end of spring 1917, at least four schools had signed up, received their donations, and began their renovations.

Madam Walker had had the idea more than a year before when she broached it with A.M. Townsend, the President of Roger Williams University in Nashville, Tennessee. Roger Williams University was founded in 1867 as The Nashville Institute by a Welsh Baptist preacher and was supported by the American Baptist Home Mission Society. It was later renamed in honor of the founder of Rhode Island in 1883.⁸² The university focused on educating blacks for the ministry and offered the A.B. degree. It had collegiate, theological, music, preparatory, normal, and industrial departments. Since

⁸¹ Madam Walker to Normal Industrial & Agricultural College of Pensacola, Florida, March 27, 1917, Box 1, Folder 7, MCJWP.

⁸² Eugene TeSelle, "The Nashville Institute and Roger Williams University: Benevolence, Paternalism, and Black Consciousness, 1867-1910," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 41, 4 (Winter 1982): 360-379.

its early days, the industrial department had offered sewing, dressmaking, physiology, nursing, printing, carpentry, farming, and gardening.⁸³

Walker visited the Nashville campus sometime in early 1916 and addressed students in an exchange that the president described as “a source of great inspiration to all of us and especially our student body.”⁸⁴ Perhaps as part of her presentation, but more likely in a private setting, Walker shared the curriculum proposal with Townsend and expressed some of her concerns about the idea. Walker felt some sort of divine inspiration for the proposal as Townsend acknowledged, “I am so glad to note that the ‘Spirit’ is guiding you toward us favorably. I think your plan to have your work established in our schools is a good one.”⁸⁵ Despite such inspiration, to which she also publicly attributed the formula for her hair-grower product, Walker felt some trepidation about the idea as Townsend felt compelled to reply, “I can conceive wherein it is prompted by a motive to make it educative to our people more than directly beneficial to you.”⁸⁶ Whether a concern that emerged from prior feedback on the idea or a general preoccupation that she maintained because of her status, Walker worried that others would negatively view the initiative and wished to have her motives properly understood.⁸⁷ Townsend had attempted to bolster Walker by stating, “Whenever we do those things which we think best, though others may impugn our motives, we can have the assurance of our own conscience that we have done our duty.” Townsend then moved

⁸³ Roger Williams University, *Catalogue of the Officers and Students of Roger Williams University*, (Nashville: Wheeler, Osbourne & Duckworth Manufacturing Company, Printers, 1885), accessed June 18, 2014, <https://archive.org/details/catalogueofoffic00roge>.

⁸⁴ A.W. Townsend to Madam Walker, May 12, 1916, Box 1, Folder 4, MCJWP.

⁸⁵ A.W. Townsend to Madam Walker, May 12, 1916, Box 1, Folder 4, MCJWP.

⁸⁶ A.W. Townsend to Madam Walker, May 12, 1916, Box 1, Folder 4, MCJWP.

⁸⁷ Madam Walker felt that her competitor, Annie Malone of the Poro Company, repeatedly misunderstood her motives and actions. She was bothered by Malone’s representation of Walker’s charitable gifts as a competitive challenge to Poro. See Madam Walker to David Jones, n.d., Box 1, Folder 18, MCJWP.

from the general to the specific, “That idea of yours is only indicative of the spirit that characterizes your life and desire to do something for your own people in a really developmental and substantial way.” He closed by adding, “I am willing to cooperate with you in any way to carry out your idea.”⁸⁸ Walker had found a receptive audience.

As an early adoptee, Roger Williams University received a \$500 donation to fund its renovations and preparations. It is not clear why this amount was reduced to \$100 for the other colleges who would adopt the program a year later, but it is clear that Townsend viewed the gift positively: “It means so much to us and to me for you to come to our rescue at this particular time, and I am sure that it will mean so much for you also.” The funding was definitely attractive, but so were the prospects. Affiliation with Madam Walker as one of the most prominent black people of the time was important for the colleges, but so was the potential for future donations and revenue generation. Ransom appears to have negotiated a deal with Roger Williams such that it received a percentage of sales of Walker products used in the training program, and then overall residual profits were divided equally between the school and the instructor, thus lowering the school’s exposure.⁸⁹ With reduced margins on the wholesale cost of products sold to Roger Williams, meaningful financial gain would have inured to the benefit of Walker only after program enrollments reached scale across the participating institutions, something she had little control over. The more immediate payoff for Walker came in being able to

⁸⁸ A.W. Townsend to Madam Walker, May 12, 1916, Box 1, Folder 4, MCJWP.

⁸⁹ Freeman B. Ransom to Mabel Marble, January 17, 1917, Box 9, Folder 2, MCJWP. In the case of two institutions, Roger Williams University in Nashville, Tennessee, and Guadalupe College in Seguin, Texas, Walker provided an instructor, a Walker agent named Mabel Marble. Marble travelled between the campuses and worked to develop markets in their locales. The other schools seemed to have provided their own instructors by sending representatives to be trained at Lelia College.

publicly announce the partnerships to reinforce beauty culture as a respectable profession and in supporting black educational institutions.

President Townsend was so enthused by the idea that he apparently began preparations without funding in hand. On January 26, 1917, Townsend acknowledged receipt of the \$500 gift for the laboratory and informed Madam Walker that the lab was complete and had been named “The Madame C.J. Walker Laboratory” in appreciation for her generosity and partnership. In the same letter, Townsend reiterated his encouragement from nearly a year earlier: “The idea you have with reference to the placing of your work in institutions for aesthetic training and so on is a proper one and shows that your motive is not a selfish one, but that you are interested in this necessary kind of development for our people.”⁹⁰ Walker had hoped that other schools would agree and follow suit.

Other black colleges were, indeed, as excited as Roger Williams University and began their preparations. Wiley University in Marshall, Texas, was also an early adopter. It reported near completion of its “Walker Hair Parlor” as a clinical laboratory and storage space for teaching the Walker system in March 1917, and requested additional support to finish. Walker directed Ransom to send an additional \$100 to Wiley to help finalize preparations.⁹¹ Arkansas Baptist College in Little Rock quickly followed suit and agreed to the partnership in early March 1917. The \$100 gift was sent to the college by the end of the month, and in acknowledgement, its president, J.A. Booker, endeavored to open the lab by fall and promised “the work will be carried vigourously [sic] and successfully to [Madam Walker’s] credit and honor.” Guadalupe College in Seguin,

⁹⁰ A.M. Townsend to Madam Walker, January 26, 1917, Box 1, Folder 7, MCJWP.

⁹¹ M.W. Dogan to Madam Walker, March 6, 1917, Box 1, Folder 7, MCJWP; Freeman B. Ransom to M.W. Dogan, March 27, 1917, Box 9, Folder 2, MCJWP.

Texas, asked for an additional \$38 gift to cover additional painting expenses, and Walker directed Ransom to send \$100.⁹²

Some schools were more cautious. Mound Bayou Industrial College in Mississippi, whose motto was “Education of the Head, Hands, and Heart,” was a logical prospective partner. Its president agreed with the idea, but asked for additional time to consider due to concerns over the costs.⁹³ Similarly, Walden College in Nashville, Tennessee, considered the proposal and inquired about additional costs, but its ultimate decision is unknown.⁹⁴

Another recipient of Walker’s proposal letter was of particular note. Mary McCleod Bethune, the black educator who founded the Daytona Normal and Industrial School for Negro Girls in 1904 in Florida and who would later found the National Council of Negro Women and serve in the administration of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, responded positively to the offer. The two women had met a few years earlier through the National Association of Colored Women and became close friends such that Bethune would deliver the eulogy at Walker’s funeral. Bethune affirmed that both she and some of her students had been using Walker’s hair grower product with great success. Consequently, she felt “it to be very beneficial indeed and would be very glad to place it in our schools as a course of study.”⁹⁵

At the time, Bethune offered elementary and industrial curricula that included cooking, sewing, laundering, gardening, poultry raising, and weaving, with growing attention paid to teacher education. Bethune had over 100 students and 11 teachers, and

⁹² J. Washington to Madam Walker, March 20, 1917, Box 1, Folder 7, MCJWP; Freeman B. Ransom to J. Washington, March 24, 1917, Box 9, Folder 2, MCJWP.

⁹³ P.M. Smith to Madam Walker August 25, 1917, Box 1, Folder 7, MCJWP.

⁹⁴ E.A. White to Freeman B. Ransom October 4, 1917, Box 9, Folder 2, MCJWP.

⁹⁵ Mary McCleod Bethune to Madam Walker April 5, 1917, Box 1, Folder 7, MCJWP.

was largely dependent upon donations to fund her \$10,453 annual budget.⁹⁶ The opportunity to receive donations from Walker and develop a potential revenue stream through the Walker product line had to be very attractive to Bethune. But she pressed for more. In her reply to Walker, Bethune asked for assistance in housing the employee she would send to New York City for training at Lelia College. Further, Bethune—ever the fundraiser—thanked Walker for her \$100 gift of two years past, and asked if such a gift could be renewed annually because “The high cost of living has made this a very anxious year for us. May we hear from you now?”⁹⁷ Walker made Bethune’s institution a legatee to her estate which confirmed her belief in and support for its industrial work.

In total, Walker made at least \$900 in donations to these black colleges, maybe more.⁹⁸ At least five colleges responded positively, and of those, four acknowledged receipt of the seed donations and executed plans for adoption of the proposal. Problems beset some of the programs from the beginning, and most do not appear to have had a long run. Roger Williams University had trouble building up a client base to support the program because of its isolated location. But the proposition remained attractive nonetheless. For most institutions, Walker’s gift amounted to 1-2% of their total operating budgets. For Guadalupe College and Roger Williams University, Walker’s gifts supported 4% and 10% of their respective annual operating budgets. Further, Walker’s gifts were similar in size to the awards made by industrialist philanthropies such as the

⁹⁶ Thomas Jesse Jones, *Negro Education: A Study of the Private and Higher Schools for Colored People in the United States*, 2 (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1917), 179.

⁹⁷ Mary McCleod Bethune to Madam Walker, April 5, 1917, Box 1, Folder 7, MCJWP.

⁹⁸ It is not clear how many colleges received Walker’s proposal and how many accepted. Surviving correspondence is limited to the institutions covered in this chapter. In her proposal letter, Walker stated that Tuskegee Institute offered the curriculum, but there is no other supporting documentation for such in the Walker Collection.

Slater Fund and the Phelps-Stokes Fund to the smaller industrial institutes.⁹⁹ Having and maintaining access to such a prominent individual black donor who could make gifts that matched those of some of the coveted white institutional donors was a boon for the struggling institutes.

It was interesting to note that these participating institutions were largely from both black and white Baptist or Methodist Episcopal denominations rather than African Methodist Episcopal, which was Madam Walker's religious affiliation. The AME Church had a string of colleges across the South and a few in the North, but none appeared to have been participants in Walker's proposed partnerships with black colleges. Madam Walker self-identified as a Christian woman and held the A.M.E. Church in high regard, as evidenced by her local affiliation with A.M.E. congregations in every city in which she lived. But she was not able to leverage the denomination's resources and networks in support of her philanthropy.

But perhaps the most interesting element of Walker's proposal for black colleges is that analysis of it provides a different perspective on the historiography of the relationship between industrial philanthropy and black colleges. Extant historiography generally treats this relationship as a negative one in which philanthropists, who were mainly prominent white men of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, used their gifts to underwrite industrial training curricula in black colleges as a means for maintaining social control of the black population by denying blacks civil rights and political empowerment. Educational historian James Anderson charged that the Hampton

⁹⁹ For profiles of black colleges and industrial institutes, including their operating budgets and sources of income, see Thomas Jesse Jones, *Negro Education: A Study of the Private and Higher Schools for Colored People in the United States*, Volume 2 (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1917). Between 1912 and 1913, these entities made awards in the range of \$200 to \$600 to the smaller-sized industrial institutes. Their larger gifts of \$10,000 or more went to Tuskegee Institute.

and Tuskegee models of industrial education represented an ideology that “was inherently opposed to the political and economic advancement of black southerners and therefore oppressive, in the objective sense that it was ranged against the development of social ideas that might have encouraged blacks to pursue basic political and social justice.” This ideology resonated with white Southerners, who were sore over Reconstruction and eager for the South to rise again, and was promulgated by white northern industrial philanthropists, such as Robert Ogden, George Foster Peabody, William Baldwin, John D. Rockefeller, and Andrew Carnegie, who provided funding to spread it across the South.¹⁰⁰

More than a decade after James Anderson’s work, Eric Anderson and Alfred Moss, Jr. argued for a more nuanced view of the major industrial funders of black education during this time period as sympathetic toward black educational needs, but more motivated by fear of white opposition in the South rather than exclusively by racial animus. Consequently, Anderson and Moss argued such motivation caused the philanthropists to implement policies and funding decisions that avoided confrontation with the South and focused more broadly on public education for all rather than exclusively on black education. In the process, they ignored black concerns and criticisms and prioritized their own plans over the aspirations of those they sought to help. Anderson and Moss also identified evolution in the thinking of industrial philanthropists over time, noting that Julius Rosenwald, for example, did not share the same philosophies

¹⁰⁰ James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 53.

of racial separation that many of the earlier industrial philanthropists held before his involvement in the 1910s and 1920s.¹⁰¹

Elsewhere, I have argued for a more nuanced view of the historical relationship between philanthropy and black education that moves “beyond hegemony” by urging investigations of black donors and fundraisers affiliated with the nineteenth-century black colleges.¹⁰² Madam Walker’s connection with and use of philanthropy to support these institutions provides just such an example for rethinking this historical problem. At face value, Walker fits the description of an industrial philanthropist despite not fitting the historical conceptual mold of such. Walker’s wealth certainly accrued from industrial enterprise and was largely directed toward educational pursuits. However, being neither white, male, nor from the North, Walker represented a different kind of industrial philanthropist, one who was not only sympathetic to the black plight, but who lived it and yearned for the opportunity of formal education. Walker identified with Booker T. Washington’s life story and his industrial program at Tuskegee, but also pursued the rudiments of classical education through her hiring of a personal tutor and voracious reading habit. She was an educational provider through her chain of beauty schools, which offered professional training in beauty culture after the mold of industrial education. She was also closely associated with the female heads of some of the well-known industrial colleges and institutes of the time, such as Mary McCleod Bethune, Nannie Helen Burroughs, Charlotte Hawkins Brown, and Lucy Laney. Walker had a proximity to the issue of black education that none of the white male industrial

¹⁰¹ Eric Anderson and Alfred Moss, Jr. *Dangerous Donations: Northern Philanthropy and Southern Black Education, 1902-1930* (Columbia: University of Missouri, 1999).

¹⁰² Tyrone M. Freeman, “Beyond Hegemony: Reappraising the History of Philanthropy and African American Higher Education in the Nineteenth Century,” *International Journal of Educational Advancement*, 10, 3 (December 2010): 148-165.

philanthropists traditionally identified with black education could have ever approximated. She identified with black aspirations for education and had her own resources to put in service to that vision.

She had proven that the industrial form of education and training could lead to a gainful career as she had transformed the lives of thousands of black women and their families through employment in beauty culture. She also demonstrated that the need for continued protest and struggle was not lost on those who were industrially educated as she advocated in many ways for black civil rights and organized her agents into benevolent clubs, in part, to do the same. She could hardly be labeled an accommodationist. Her business interests did not depend upon an appeased white South. The fear that Anderson and Moss noted as motivating the white industrial philanthropists to act as they did was of no consequence for Walker. That said, Walker was not immune to critique from the black community. In the early 1910s, prominent black leaders, such as Booker T. Washington, had levied criticisms against Walker, specifically, and beauty culture, generally, for trying to straighten black women's hair and adopting white aesthetics of beauty. Walker eventually won Washington's endorsement, but his criticisms and those of others remained a source of frustration. The initiative with black colleges was one way to validate the legitimacy of both the Walker system and beauty culture as a profession.

Further, these gifts occurred at an interesting time in Walker's life. In 1916 and 1917, Walker's national reputation was in place. Once ignored by Booker T. Washington and able to view NACW only from a distance, Walker had secured Washington's endorsement before his death and was a highly prized speaker for and supporter of

NACW. She was known overseas, had established markets in Central America and the Caribbean, and had an eye toward Europe and Africa. She was convening black leaders at her palatial estate in New York, and increasingly moving in a Pan-African direction in her advocacy and racial uplift work. Her wealth was growing and she was starting to think about her legacy.

Walker's Testamentary Documents

In addition to Freeman B. Ransom's letter on Madam Walker's philanthropy, Walker's last will and testament and codicil to that will have also served as important points of reference for Walker's generosity because of their numerous charitable provisions. Madam Walker had finalized her last will and testament on May 28, 1917, which was shortly after she returned from an extended retreat in Hot Springs, Arkansas, to gain rest due to her high blood pressure and continuing kidney problems.¹⁰³ In January 1919, Walker had begun creating a codicil to her last will and testament with assistance from Ransom. It was finalized on April 29, 1919.¹⁰⁴ During this time, she had taken ill while travelling through the Midwest and visiting her favored city of St. Louis, Missouri. Her friend Jessie Robinson and others travelled with her back to New York by train to get her home. She was near death and had taken steps to ensure certain provisions were in place, including making several deathbed pledges to her dearest causes such as the NAACP, Palmer Memorial Institute, and Daytona Normal and Industrial Institute. The seriousness of her medical condition was reflected in the shakiness of Walker's signature on the codicil document. Death did not wait long to come.

¹⁰³ Last Will and Testament of Sarah Walker, May 28, 1917, Box 3, Folder 4, MCJWP.

¹⁰⁴ Codicil to Sarah Breedlove's Last Will and Testament, April 29, 1919, Box 3, Folder 4, MCJWP.

Walker died on May 25, 1919. Her death was announced in newspapers around the country and overseas. Her funeral service was held on May 30th at Villa Lewaro. The event was a grand affair and was attended by everyday people from far and wide as well as leaders from Tuskegee Institute, NAACP, the League, YMCA and other organizations. Adam Clayton Powell, Sr., Langston Hughes, and Mary McCleod Bethune were among the leading figures that were present.

The affidavit of Death and Proof of Will was signed on June 12, 1919 as Lelia confirmed Walker's death.¹⁰⁵ The will was probated in open court in Indianapolis on June 12, 1919, and the appraisal of Walker's estate began on September 11, 1919.¹⁰⁶ One day later, several organizations and individuals who had a claim of interest in Walker's property were given notice of pending appraisal by the State of New York for Walker's properties in that state.¹⁰⁷

On September 11, 1926, Lelia filed her final report as executrix.¹⁰⁸ Lelia confirmed receipt of a \$10,000 payment for an executrix fee as well as \$11,600 worth of jewelry and additional furniture and goods valued at \$53,137.78. The report listed total payments of \$458,043.97 to individuals, companies, and charitable organizations to satisfy Walker's debts and legatees. The vast majority of these funds went to the individuals Walker named and the companies to whom she owed debts, but among the legatees were nineteen charities:

¹⁰⁵ Affidavit of Death and Proof of Will, June 12, 1919, Box 3, Folder 4, MCJWP.

¹⁰⁶ Appraiser's Notice, September 11, 1919, Box 3, Folder 5, MCJWP.

¹⁰⁷ Opening of Probate, September 11, 1919, Box 3, Folder 5, MCJWP; Report of Appraiser, October 1919, Box 3, Folder 6 and Box 3, Folder 7, MCJWP.

¹⁰⁸ Executrix's Final Report, September 11, 1926, Box 3, Folder 7, MCJWP.

Home for the Aged and Infirm Colored People (Pittsburgh)	\$500
Sojourner Truth house (NY)	\$500
Wilberforce University (OH)	\$500
Peoples' Hospital (St. Louis)	\$500
Pine Street Branch YMCA (St. Louis)	\$1,500
YWCA (St. Louis)	\$1,500
YWCA (Louisville, KY)	\$500
YMCA (NY 135 th Street)	\$1,500
YWCA (NY 137 th Street)	\$1,500
NAACP	\$4,000
Manassas Industrial Institute (VA)	\$4,755*
Colored Orphans' Home (St. Louis)	\$955*
Tuskegee Institute (Alabama)	\$1,905*
Daytona Normal and Industrial Institute (FL)	\$4,755*
Alpha Home (Indianapolis)	\$5,000
Mite Missionary Society (St. Louis)	\$1,910*
Colored Old Folks' Home (St. Louis)	\$4,755*
Haines Institute (GA)	\$4,755*
Palmer Memorial Institute	\$955* ¹⁰⁹

Of these nineteen legatees, only eight were specifically named by Walker in her testamentary documents: the Alpha Home, Tuskegee Institute, NAACP, Daytona Normal and Industrial Institute, Manassas Industrial Institute, Old Folks' Home in St. Louis, Haines Institute, and the Mite Missionary Society. The rest—the old folks' home in Pittsburgh, Sojourner Truth House, Wilberforce University, People's Hospital in St. Louis, the YMCAs, the YWCAs, and Palmer Memorial Institute—reflected Walker's philanthropic concern for education and racial uplift via social services, but were decided by Lelia as executor of the estate.

In total, \$42,245 went to these organizations representing approximately 10% of the appraised value of the estate, a far cry from Walker's desired goal of leaving 1/3 of her estate for charitable provisions. This fact has not be included in scholarship that references Walker's philanthropy based on her will. Its continual omission prevents a full

¹⁰⁹ Executrix's Final Report, September 11, 1926, Box 3, Folder 7, MCJWP; Entries marked with an asterisk reflect post-tax gift amounts.

accounting for Walker's generosity by separating her charitable intent from the execution of it. The discrepancy between Walker's intended charitable provisions and legatees and those actually executed and supported by Lelia as executor is explained at least in part by the significant debts Walker incurred, which reduced the total amount of funds available for charities. Also, Lelia had taken legal action to have the courts void certain provisions of the will, including the charitable provision for \$10,000 to fund the creation of an industrial school in Africa because no specific school was named and because Lelia did not feel able to create such a school.¹¹⁰ Despite the details of their final settlement after Walker's death, these testamentary documents yield much for understanding Walker's philanthropic intent, motivations, and ambitions.

Wills as Social Documents

Historians and social scientists have examined wills across time, cultures, and national contexts as social documents for understanding family relations, legal systems, inheritance practices, power relations, and social orders.¹¹¹ Scholars have found particular value in wills for understanding the lived experiences and agency of individuals, generally, and of women, specifically. Scholars have come to understand women's wills as being fundamentally different in character from those of men. Such differences were a

¹¹⁰ Memorandum on Construction of Walker Will, n.d., Box 3, Folder 10, MCJWP.

¹¹¹ Janet Finch, Lynn Hayes, Jennifer Mason, Judith Masson, and Lorraine Wallis, *Wills, Inheritance, and Families* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); Ray Madoff, *Immortality and the Law: The Rising Power of the American Dead* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010); Lawrence M. Friedman, *Dead Hands: A Social History of Wills, Trusts, and Inheritance Law* (Stanford: Stanford Law Books, 2009); Carole Shammas, Marylynn Salmon, and Michel Dahlin, *Inheritance in America From Colonial Times to the Present* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987); Marvin B. Sussman, Judith N. Cates, and David T. Smith, *The Family and Inheritance* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1970); Lawrence Friedman, "Patterns of Testation in the 19th Century: A Study of Essex County (New Jersey) Wills," *American Journal of Legal History* 8 (1964): 34-53; Sandra Cavallo, *Charity and Power in Early Modern Italy: Benefactors and their Motives in Turin, 1541-1789* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

matter of both content and instrumentality. In terms of content, women's wills were more likely than those of men to contain non-kin beneficiaries, gift distributions to individuals, itemized personal property, charitable provisions, and an equitable distribution of property to beneficiaries.¹¹² In terms of instrumentality, women have historically used their wills to portray their respectability, honor, and social status to society as well as to negotiate their public images.¹¹³ According to historian Giovanna Benadusi, women's wills reflected the "social organization and class constraints affecting the position of testators," and thus emerged as "a way for women to tell their stories" and assert their social standing.¹¹⁴ She presented the example of how domestic servant women in seventeenth-century Italy used their wills to assert their identities despite their grave poverty. Benadusi also demonstrated how female employers used gift provisions for staff in their wills not only to express gratitude for loyal service, but also to reinforce their own dominant social status and, in the process—and perhaps unintentionally—they reified existing social inequities. Consequently, women's wills have been shown by scholars to display—across time and cultures—the full web of women's relations in all their complexities, including their social roles and identities as mothers, citizens, friends, and employers.

While there are numerous studies on the role of gender and class in shaping last wills, there is very little specific research on African American testators in any historical

¹¹² Daphna Hacker, "The Gendered Dimensions of Inheritance: Empirical Food for Legal Thought," *Journal of Empirical Legal Studies* 7, 2 (June 2010): 322-354; Maria Isabel Martinez Mira, "Female Testaments as Social Discourse: A Textual Analysis Under Critical Discourse Analysis Approach," *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 2, 2, (May 2011): 101-110; Giovanna Benadusi, "Investing the Riches of the Poor: Servant Women and their Last Wills," *American Historical Review* 109, 3 (June 2004): 805-826.

¹¹³ Maria Isabel Martinez Mira, "Female Testaments as Social Discourse: A Textual Analysis Under Critical Discourse Analysis Approach," *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 2, 2 (May 2011): 106.

¹¹⁴ Giovanna Benadusi, "Investing the Riches of the Poor: Servant Women and their Last Wills," *American Historical Review* 109, 3 (June 2004): 806, 805.

period or on their race and wills, more generally. As another social status that has been used to establish power relations and assert control in society, race, like class and gender, has historically represented a social constraint with far-reaching implications. Federal and state laws in the United States varied in their recognition of African Americans' humanity, freedom, self-determination, and rights of property ownership over time as reflected in African Americans' centuries-long struggle to transition from being property to owning property. Madam Walker lived during a transitional episode in this history and an analysis of her testamentary documents shows how she navigated her social position with respect to race during a time when women's practices of producing wills were emerging. Women's wills were rare in nineteenth-century America, but became increasingly more common in the early twentieth century.¹¹⁵ Further, the general use of wills to make charitable bequests was also rare. In two separate studies of randomly selected wills, one on New Jersey testators from the late nineteenth and very early twentieth centuries and another on California testators from the mid twentieth century, charitable giving provisions were found to be extremely uncommon.¹¹⁶ And so Walker's last will was a historically significant document because of her use of it to assert her identity as an honorable, respectable, God-fearing, and generous black female business owner. It verified her philanthropic motivations, priorities, and hopes for her race, and told succeeding generations how she wished to be remembered.

¹¹⁵ Lawrence Friedman, "Patterns of Testation in the 19th Century: A Study of Essex County (New Jersey) Wills. 8 *American Journal of Legal History* (1964): 36.

¹¹⁶ Lawrence Friedman, "Patterns of Testation in the 19th Century: A Study of Essex County (New Jersey) Wills. 8 *American Journal of Legal History* (1964): 34-53; Lawrence Friedman, Christopher Walker, Ben Hernandez-Stern, "The Inheritance Process in San Bernardino County, California, 1964: A Research Note, *Houston Law Review* 43 (2006-2007): 1445-1474.

Wills as Testator's Voice

Legal scholar Karen Sneddon has developed a methodology for analyzing last wills that is useful for understanding Madam C.J. Walker's testamentary documents.¹¹⁷ Sneddon viewed the will as "the most important and personal legal document an individual ever executes...[that] becomes the last words spoken by the testator."¹¹⁸ She argued that despite being drafted by an attorney, the will contains the voice of the testator as represented through a "persona" crafted to merge the testator's wishes with the required legalisms. Across a series of articles in which she provided extensive reviews of law, literature, and the historical evolution of wills, Sneddon has conceptualized the last will as a legal document, a personal story, and a lasting legacy.

As a legal document, the last will, according to Sneddon, was "the unilateral disposition of one's property, in whole or in part, that takes effect on the individual's death. It is generally revocable, and it is generally written." She further asserted that the will "memorializes the individual's personal wishes and hopes for individuals and entities that are important...[and] addresses the individual's property, which many individuals view as an extension of themselves. The document plans for the continued care of loved ones and loved charitable causes." According to Sneddon, the will, as a document generally co-constructed by an attorney and the testator, used legal parlance to convey the testator's voice. This task was accomplished by the drafting attorney's internalization and translation of "the individual testator's voice into a substantively accurate and operative written document." For Sneddon, detecting voice in wills required more than "rote

¹¹⁷ Karen Sneddon noted that attention to voice in wills began in the 1960s, but she deploys her method to wills from different historical periods from colonial to present. See Karen Sneddon, "Speaking for the Dead: Voice in Last Wills and Testaments," *St. Johns Law Review* 85 (2011): 683-754.

¹¹⁸ Karen Sneddon, "Speaking for the Dead: Voice in Last Wills and Testaments," *St. Johns Law Review* 85 (2011): 754

examination of word choice, point of view, and tone” in a text, but discernment of the sensibility behind the text.¹¹⁹ Wills reflected the sensibilities of their testators through the naming of beneficiaries, the identification of property to bequeath, and the resulting personal story told by the text.

Sneddon described wills as personal narratives beyond “a series of instructions.” Wills, according to Sneddon, were documents whose development required individual confrontation with death, and, as a result, emerged as personal narrative repositories of the values, relationships, and identities most consequential to testators. While the language of wills was overwhelmingly focused on the disposition of property, Sneddon argued that “the identification of property and the descriptions of property underscore the value the testator placed on the property and the relationship between the testator and the beneficiary.” Additionally, the use of the first-person “I” throughout the narrative further personalized the “story” and emphasized the testator’s agency, control, and choice.¹²⁰ The personal narrative qualities of wills, even in their formal structure, formed the basis for their commemorative function.

As instruments for legacy-making, wills contained what Sneddon called, “direct *memento mori* moments.”¹²¹ A Latin phrase meaning “remember you must die,” *momento mori* reflected the burden of confronting one’s mortality and the opportunity to consider one’s legacy. By providing both onus and occasion, the will writing process could have inspired changes in the testator’s remaining lifetime, and enabled construction of a “post-death identity.” From the disposal of their own remains to the care of loved

¹¹⁹ Karen Sneddon, “Speaking for the Dead: Voice in Last Wills and Testaments,” *St. Johns Law Review* 85 (2011): 685, 684, 723, 691.

¹²⁰ Karen Sneddon, “The Will as Personal Narrative,” *The Elder Law Journal* 20, 2 (2012): 359, 400, 356-410, 359, 400.

¹²¹ Karen Sneddon, “Memento Mori: Death and Wills,” *Wyoming Law Review* 14, 1 (2014): 235

ones and the provisions for charity, testators used wills to set the tone for and terms of their legacies. In this way, Sneddon described the will as “a document of the past, written in the present, for the future.”¹²²

Sneddon’s framework is useful for approaching Walker’s testamentary documents because it provides a means for penetrating analysis of the instructions she left behind. These documents have been used frequently by scholars to illustrate Walker’s generosity to charities through her bequests. However, Sneddon’s framework reveals that such uses reflect only a preliminary understanding, and that more the critical elements of Walker’s identity, values, and intended legacy can be discerned.

Madam Walker’s Last Will and Testament

Walker’s last will matched the structural and organizational conventions that were common for such documents. Wills generally included an exordium section that introduced the testator and demonstrated her ability to create an authentic document; a listing of provisions to dispose of personal property, cash, stock, other assets and the residue of the estate; and a testimonium section through which the testator executed the document with date and signature, and witnesses verified that such date and signature were written in their presence by counter-signing.¹²³ Walker began her will with the phrase, “IN THE NAME OF GOD, AMEN” a common invocation that reinforced religious affiliations, but mainly served as a signal to interested parties to abide by the

¹²² Karen Sneddon, “Memento Mori: Death and Wills,” *Wyoming Law Review* 14, 1 (2014): 240, 235, 240, 252.

¹²³ Karen Sneddon, “Speaking for the Dead: Voice in Last Wills and Testaments,” *St. Johns Law Review* 85 (2011): 740; Karen Sneddon, “In the Name of God, Amen: Language in Last Wills and Testaments,” *Quinnipiac Law Review* 29 (2011): 687.

terms of the document.¹²⁴ As a Christian, Walker would not have started her will in any other manner especially since she publically attributed the formula for her hair grower product to a divine dream. The rest of the exordium was fairly standard: “I, Sarah Walker, better known as Madam C.J. Walker, of Indianapolis, Marion County, State of Indiana, being of sound mind and disposing mind and memory, do make, declare, and publish this my last will and Testament [sic], hereby revoking all former wills by me made.”¹²⁵ This phrase certified Walker’s identity and legal residence.¹²⁶ The remainder of the three-page document contained twenty-nine items that represented the provisions per Walker’s directions.

Sneddon emphasized that a will’s “order of provisions is an opportunity to incorporate voice” as there was great flexibility in sequencing provisions to best reflect the testator’s interests and desires. In general practice, the order of provisions usually started with gifts of personal property, cash, other financial assets, and the residuary of the estate, and listed them and their recipients in order of importance to the testator.¹²⁷ In the will’s first item, after directing that all debts and funeral expenses be paid, Walker gifted the title and interest of her company to her daughter, and then made a series of cash gifts to friends, family members, and employees before returning to the disposal of tangible personal property and charitable bequests. Walker’s most prized relationship and asset comprised the second item. Walker gave her daughter Lelia one third of the Walker Company, no surprise as she wanted the company to remain in family hands and for her

¹²⁴ Karen Sneddon, “In the Name of God, Amen: Language in Last Wills and Testaments,” *Quinnipiac Law Review* 29 (2011): 699.

¹²⁵ Last Will and Testament of Sarah Walker, Box 3, Folder 4, MCJWP.

¹²⁶ Even though Walker had moved from Indianapolis to New York in 1916, she maintained Indianapolis as her legal residence.

¹²⁷ Karen Sneddon, “Speaking for the Dead: Voice in Last Wills and Testaments,” *St. Johns Law Review* 85 (2011): 740-741.

daughter to have the primary benefit. The next four provisions provided financial gifts to two very close friends and two family members. Alice Kelly, Walker's friend, personal tutor and factory foreman, was given \$10,000 and a lifetime job at the company provided she "honestly and faithfully" performed her duties.¹²⁸ Parthenia Rawlins, Walker's long-time acquaintance to whom she referred to as "grandma," received \$5 per week for the rest of her life as well as burial expenses.¹²⁹ To her sister and nephew, Louvenia and Willie, Walker left \$50 per month for life plus burial expenses and \$1,000, respectively. Louvenia was Walker's only sister and she had cared for young Sarah following the death of their parents. Walker loved her dearly and made sure she was comfortable. Having secured Willie's pardon a few years earlier, Walker was deeply concerned that he "have a decent start in life."¹³⁰ These first beneficiaries named in the will represented Walker's core concern about caring for her dearest relations and providing a significant source of support that would enable them to lead more secure lives in a hostile society. With three failed marriages behind her and difficult memories of her stressful relationship with one of her brother-in-laws, Walker's personal interactions with men were largely unpleasant, save for those in her employ such as Ransom and Brokenburr. Her gift to her nephew Willie, in many ways, may have represented her aspirations for the men of her race—that they be able to rise above their circumstances and lead lives in service to their families and to the race.

¹²⁸ Last Will and Testament of Sarah Walker, Box 3, Folder 4, MCJWP. The provision for Kelly also included \$500 for George O. Barnes, Jr., Walker's self-described "little friend," a term she used for children. The nature of her relationship with Barnes is unclear.

¹²⁹ *The Appeal*, June 21, 1919, "Walker Will," accessed July 8, 2014, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83016810/1919-06-21/ed-1/seq-2/>.

¹³⁰ Will and Testament of Sarah Walker, Box 3, Folder 4, MCJWP.

Item 7 in the will outlined Walker's self-described "greatest ambition"—the building of her "Tuskegee in Africa."¹³¹ She stipulated that if such a school were in existence at her death, all owned stock and securities were to be directed toward its support. If such school was not in existence, \$10,000 was to be given to establish it. This provision was followed by an item to create a trust fund for the maintenance and upkeep of Villa Lewaro, Walker's mansion in New York, and for annual donations to charities. The trust fund was to be overseen by Ransom and four other "colored citizens of Indianapolis" as appointed by the Marion County Probate Court.¹³² Here we see Walker's greatest ambition and greatest achievement on display. The school in Africa signified Walker's unequivocal belief in education, her unrelenting support for industrial education, and her emerging Pan-Africanist consciousness. Villa Lewaro represented a monument to not only her own success, but to the unlimited possibilities of the race. Walker wanted African Americans to embrace the compound as an asset of which they all could be proud and that should be used in service of their common liberation. Her use of the house to host meetings for NACW, International League of Darker Peoples, and other racial uplift organizations had already begun that process.

Walker then turned attention to her tangible personal property, identified broadly as household goods, which she left to Lelia to keep or distribute among friends and family. As part of this same provision, Walker left \$25 per month to Mary Hudson, an elderly friend from St. Louis, and \$1,000 to Agnes Prosser, her ex-sister-in-law from

¹³¹ William H. Davis, *Report of the Thirteenth Annual Convention of the National Negro Business League* (Washington D.C.: 1912), 155.

¹³² Will and Testament of Sarah Walker, Box 3, Folder 4, MCJWP.

Louisville, Kentucky.¹³³ During Walker's marriage to her brother, C.J., Agnes, known as Peggy to Walker, had observed C.J.'s business and marital infidelities and the two women became close. This item also identified three other women as friends whom Walker wanted remembered in some fashion, but she did not outline provisions to indicate how.¹³⁴

Walker then made provisions for a child named Sarah Wilson to be given \$500 and for four charities. The Colored Orphan Home of St. Louis, the Colored Alpha Home of Indianapolis, and the Mite Missionary Society of St. Paul AME Church in St. Louis were to be given \$1,000 each. Tuskegee Institute in Alabama was slated to receive \$2,000, undoubtedly in recognition of its founder, Booker T. Washington, a man whom Walker revered. The \$1,000 bequest to the Mite Missionary Society was amended in a subsequent item to be invested as an endowment for continuous support of the society.

Walker only had one child, but she made provisions in her will for other children that may have been "natural or adopted."¹³⁵ In 1912, Lelia had adopted a teenage girl named Fairy Mae Bryant (Mae). Walker loved Mae as if she were related by blood, and this provision suggested that she may have considered following suit with an adoption of her own, but none occurred.¹³⁶ The next provision left more property, another residence in New York, to Lelia. Further, Walker indicated that all remaining property given to Lelia and that Lelia was to receive life use of the Villa Lewaro property, meaning she could live in it until her death and then the provisions for disposal would take place.

¹³³ *The Appeal*, June 21, 1919, "Walker Will," accessed July 8, 2014.

<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83016810/1919-06-21/ed-1/seq-2/>

¹³⁴ These women were Ella Scott Dunovant, Viola Evans, and Annie Caldwell. The nature of their relations to Walker is unclear.

¹³⁵ Will and Testament of Sarah Walker, Box 3, Folder 4, MCJWP.

¹³⁶ According to a newspaper account, Walker considered adopting the African male student she supported through a scholarship at Tuskegee Institute. See "America's Foremost Colored Woman," *Indianapolis Freeman*, December 28, 1912, p. 16.

Walker also made provisions for her domestic staff, those individuals who had managed personal aspects of her life such as her residences. She left \$5,000 to Louis Tyler, her chauffeur, who diligently drove Walker across the country during her extended tours through various regions, including the Jim Crow South. Owning her automobile and having a driver enabled Walker to avoid the indignities and dangers of segregated trains. She also directed that any other “domestic help” receive the same amount provided they had worked for Walker for five years. This type of conditional bequest was a common tool used by testators to induce certain behaviors in their beneficiaries.¹³⁷ In this instance, Walker used it to incentivize good employees to stay in their roles to work for Lelia as heir to the estate. Similar conditional provisions were made for other employees, including Ransom and Brokenburr, who both stayed with the company for many years after Walker’s death.

In her next set of provisions, Walker remembered other sets of dear relations. First, there were the children of her friends and advisors. Ransom’s son was given a home in Chicago, the son of Walker’s physician Dr. Ward was given \$1,000, and Brokenburr’s daughter was given \$500. These gifts represented the significance of Walker’s relationships with the fathers of these children. Walker continued with provisions for Thirsapen, her niece, to whom she left \$1,000 and a home in California. Then, she remembered Violet Davis, the company’s bookkeeper, and Maggie Wilson, a friend and high-performing agent from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, with \$2,000 and \$1,000 respectively.

¹³⁷ Ray D. Madoff, *Immortality and the Law: The Rising Power of the American Dead* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 72.

Among her final provisions, Walker declared that she was “anxious to help members of my Race to acquire modern homes.”¹³⁸ Walker’s love of real estate was well known as evidenced by the properties she owned and disposed of through the will as well as her directive that no such properties be liquidated to fulfill the obligations of the will. This provision noted that if Walker had not taken significant action in the area of making housing more available to African Americans that the committee of trustees determine a manner in which to do so. Ransom was a member of that committee and had great responsibility for fulfilling her testamentary wishes. Her trust in him was evident in her final provisional item for him to continue working in her company.

And so, as a document created in 1917, Walker’s last will and testament reflected Walker’s initial plans for establishing her legacy. Through it, she identified her most treasured relationships and values. The document presented Walker’s maternal, familial, social, and business roles and relations. The charities listed in the will were also present in Ransom’s philanthropy letter and demonstrated that Walker’s firm commitment to racial uplift, education, and social services only increased over time. These same elements were reiterated and reinforced in Walker’s codicil.

Madam Walker’s Codicil

In January 1919, Walker had begun drafting a codicil to her last will and testament. In a letter to Ransom, Walker directed changes to be made.¹³⁹ These included several charitable provisions. First, she directed that “residue and undisposed part of my business, the profits which may accrue from year to year, to be put in a general trust fund

¹³⁸ Will and Testament of Sarah Walker, Box 3, Folder 4, MCJWP.

¹³⁹ Madam Walker to Freeman B. Ransom, January 10, 1919, Box 1, MCJWP.

for charities.” She then required that \$100,000 be set aside for the maintenance of her New York mansion named Villa Lewaro so that it and the maintenance fund could be given to the International League of Darker Peoples if it was “measuring up to the satisfaction of the committee” or else the committee would “select an organization doing the most good for the race.” Her gifting of her house to an organization came with the provision that it never be used as housing for orphans, old folks, or a school, possibly to preserve it as a monument to success and facilitate its further usage as a place for convening leaders of the race to discuss problems and devise plans.¹⁴⁰

In another provision, Walker directed that \$50,000 be split evenly between the NAACP and the ILDP “provided that they are working together toward the same end—for the uplift and benefit of the race.” If either organization failed to cooperate, Walker ordered that the bequest be forfeited. Ransom was an NAACP man and had concerns about Walker’s association with the ILDP because of his belief that it had socialist leanings and policy positions detrimental to African Americans. And so he informed Walker of his objection: “In wills people only remember established institutions of standing and of proven worth. Never to an organization in the mere making of the organization, you don’t know now whether it will turn out a blessing or a disgrace. Just because you have hopes for the thing does not by any means make it a success. Hope you will get my meaning.”¹⁴¹ Walker must have agreed or perhaps begrudgingly relented because ILDP was not named in the final version of the codicil—the NAACP was

¹⁴⁰ Madam Walker to Freeman B. Ransom, January 10, 1919, Box 1, MCJWP.

¹⁴¹ Freeman B. Ransom to Madam Walker, January 26, 1919, Box 1, Folder 15, MCJWP.

instead. Following this provision, Walker then wanted remaining investment income and business profits “to go for educational and uplift work in Africa.”¹⁴²

Her revisions focused on increasing the amount of specific bequests to charities run by women. She added a \$10,000 bequest for Palmer Memorial Institute and set bequests for Daytona Normal and Industrial Institute, Manassas Industrial School, Old Folks Home in Indianapolis, Old Folks Home in St. Louis, and Haines Institute at \$5,000 each. She further wrote that the Mite Missionary Society’s bequest of \$1,000 should be doubled. When it came to Tuskegee Institute, however, Walker felt Booker T. Washington’s institution had sufficient resources: “In view of the fact that Tuskegee has been so bountifully provided for, we will let item #13 stand.” Item #13 was a provision in the will that bequeathed \$2,000 to Tuskegee. She knew that her resources would go further at the other institutions, where \$5,000 to \$10,000 could fund an entire year’s budget or at least a significant portion thereof. At Tuskegee, the same amount was not as consequential in light of its nearly \$300,000 annual operating budget and nearly \$2 million endowment.¹⁴³ Her gifts would do more and mean more at the women-run institutions.

From these revisions, it was evident where Walker’s deepest commitments rested. Walker concluded the letter to Ransom with the following: “I guess you think I am hashing out money, with a very lavish hand, but I am taking into consideration that the business is constantly on the increase and in the next five [years] I will be able to do all

¹⁴² Madam Walker to Freeman B. Ransom, January 10, 1919, Box 1, MCJWP.

¹⁴³ Madam Walker to Freeman B. Ransom, January 10, 1919, Box 1, MCJWP; Tuskegee Institute, *Annual Report of the President* (Tuskegee: Institute Press, 1915), 5, 8, 13, 165, accessed on July 3, 2014. <http://books.google.com/books?id=2nisVsoT7VQC&pg=PA6&lpg=PA6&dq=Tuskegee+Institute+budget+in+1912&source=bl&ots=pEHGc03ZMT&sig=pxYBcNfbUZyqVuG1SPwlNAvw-ig&hl=en&sa=X&ei=nIy1U4q4GMOhyAT34YHYCQ&ved=0CB4Q6AEwATgU#v=onepage&q=Tuskegee%20Institute%20budget%20in%201912&f=false>.

that I plan. I hope the time will come when I will be able to do many of these things before I pass away, as I would get so much pleasure out of it.”¹⁴⁴ Such sentiment reflected Walker’s sense of responsibility to give according to her means and the joy of giving she felt by helping others. Eight days later, Ransom replied to Walker “I think I have covered everything suggested by you in your codicil.” He had made the revisions and advised her to sign the document, have two witnesses counter-sign, and return it to him for placement in a bank vault.¹⁴⁵

The final codicil that was executed revised only particular sections of the last will while letting the rest of the original document’s provisions stand. It contained only eight items. Instead of leaving her Chicago home to her godson, Frank Ransom, she gave him \$10,000. Instead of one trust fund set up from the residue of the estate for the purposes of maintaining Villa Lewaro and giving to charity, Walker declared that two trust funds be established with \$100,000 each to serve both purposes. The NAACP won out over the ILDP as the beneficiary of Villa Lewaro, but it still had to prove itself to be worthy and in good standing via the executive committee of the estate.

In addition to the aforementioned revised bequest amounts to several black industrial schools and social service agencies, Walker also adjusted her provisions for the important young people in her life. Her adopted granddaughter Mae was bequeathed \$2,000, her godson Hubert Barnes Ross was given \$10,000, and Nerrisa Lee Brokenburr, daughter of Walker employee and advisor Robert Brokenburr, was given \$1,000.¹⁴⁶ These bequests represented investments in the future of the race, which were well placed. Brokenburr would go on to graduate from Oberlin College with distinction and ahead of

¹⁴⁴ Madam Walker to Freeman B. Ransom, January 10, 1919, Box 1, MCJWP.

¹⁴⁵ Freeman B. Ransom to Madam Walker, January 18, 1919, Box 1, Folder 15, MCJWP.

¹⁴⁶ Sarah Wilson was given \$1,000, but her relationship to Walker is unclear.

schedule. Walker was friends with Ross' mother, Carolyn Barnes, who was from Indianapolis but served as a teacher at Tuskegee Institute. Barnes had died just days after Hubert's birth in April 1916 and Walker felt a keen sense of identification with and responsibility for him. The bequest ultimately helped to finance Ross' education at Yale University and Columbia University where he studied with distinguished sociologists and anthropologists. As a black anthropologist and educator, Ross taught in the Atlanta University system for years and trained an entire generation of black social scientists.¹⁴⁷ Ross' contribution to the higher education of African Americans would have made Walker proud given her life-long pursuit of learning.

Walker also used the codicil to reinforce her desire to recognize her domestic staff, such as her chauffeur, through gifts of \$5,000 each, but also included her friends Jessie Robinson and Ida Winchester from St. Louis as well as Louis George from New York. Again, these relationships were very special to Walker as important parts of her life story of transition from poverty to success. Finally, she ordered that Ransom's salary be increased on an annual basis until it reached \$10,000 and that Robert Brokenburr's salary be increased to \$5,000.

Together, these elements provided a framework for remembrance. In her testamentary documents, we see Walker's concern for her race; her maternal and sisterly connections to women and children; her business relationships; her investment in the next generation; and her commitment to education, racial uplift and social services. In particular, her aspirations for black men were evident in her gifts to young male children and the male leaders of her company.

¹⁴⁷ Ira E. Harrison, "Hubert B. Ross, the Anthropologist Who Was," in *African-American Pioneers in Anthropology* Ira E. Harrison and Faye V. Harrison, ed. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 265-273.

Madam Walker's Legacy

In 1913, Walker had told the audience at the NNBL conference, "I am not and never have been 'close-fisted,' for all who know me will tell you that I am a liberal hearted woman."¹⁴⁸ Public recognition of her generosity was verified six years later in the outpouring of grief over Walker's death. The response was immense and palpable. Letters, memos, and telegrams flooded the Walker residence and business office as people from around the country expressed their deep sense of loss. A review of the dozens of condolence communications revealed important themes. Regardless of whether these individuals were close personal friends or admirers from a distance, they shared a common sense of the meaning of Walker's life. They saw her as a race woman who was very generous.

First, Walker was viewed as an exemplar race woman. Letter after letter referenced her significance as a "Lover and worker for her race" or "heroine" and "foremost woman of our race."¹⁴⁹ They praised her for the "useful and noble life" she led.¹⁵⁰ The phrase "useful life" was used repeatedly as writers sought ways of expressing their view of Walker. Mrs. J.C. Frazier wrote that "Her useful life was a benediction."¹⁵¹ The Byron brothers agonized, "Death...had deprived us of the most useful woman of our race."¹⁵² Part of Walker's usefulness undoubtedly extended from her work ethic which drove her success. W.P. Curtis, Walker's doctor from St. Louis, acknowledged that

¹⁴⁸ William H. Davis, *Report of the Fourteenth Annual Convention of the National Negro Business League*, (Washington D.C.: 1913), 212.

¹⁴⁹ Gertrude Johnson to Freeman B. Ransom, May 31, 1919, Box 2, Folder 25, MCJWP; Gina Shelly to Lelia Walker Robinson, May 29, 1919, Box 2, Folder 28, MCJWP; W.F. Cozart to Lelia Walker Robinson, May 26, 1919, Box 2, Folder 23, MCJWP.

¹⁵⁰ Lillie P. Barnes to Lelia Walker Robinson, May 26, 1919, Box 2, Folder 22, MCJWP.

¹⁵¹ Mrs. J.C. Frazier to Lelia Walker Robinson, May 27, 1919 Box 2, Folder 24, MCJWP.

¹⁵² The Byron Brothers to Lelia Walker Robinson, May 27, 1919, Box 2, Folder 22, MCJWP.

Walker had “crowded into the few years a century of achievements.”¹⁵³ Consequently, many people saw Walker as an example to follow: “Madam Walker was a living example of what one can accomplish.”¹⁵⁴ George Harris stated that Walker modeled “the progress of the race and its ability to take advantage of its all too few opportunities.”¹⁵⁵ Walker thus became a source of inspiration, something Eugene Kinckle Jones, head of the Urban League, said she “created in the breasts of others.”¹⁵⁶ Florence Garnette, principal of the Florence Garnette Training School for Little Girls in New York, noted that she used Walker as an example for her students at her training school.¹⁵⁷

Second, the authors certainly remembered Walker’s generosity. R.W. Thompson called her “a genuine philanthropist and a practical benefactor.”¹⁵⁸ J.C. Napier remembered her as “Our most progressive and philanthropic woman.”¹⁵⁹ It was clear by such sentiments that Walker’s desired legacy was already in existence prior to her death. African Americans, and increasingly people of color outside the United States, had looked to Walker as an exemplar race woman who dedicated her life to serving others and providing inspiration and opportunities for a people desperately in need of both given their social circumstances.

While the letters of bereavement eventually ceased coming to the Walker residence, Walker’s legacy continued to pervade the cultural imagination of African Americans for decades after her death in 1919. Freeman B. Ransom and Robert Brokenburr certainly did their part to keep her name in the mouths of the people. The

¹⁵³ W.P. Curtis to Lelia Walker Robinson, May 25, 1919, Box 2, Folder 23, MCJWP.

¹⁵⁴ R. Black to Lelia Walker Robinson, May 29, 1919, Box 2, Folder 22, MCJWP.

¹⁵⁵ George Harris to Lelia Walker Robinson, June 6, 1919, Box 2, Folder 24, MCJWP.

¹⁵⁶ Eugene Kinckle Jones to Lelia Walker Robinson, May 26, 1919, Box 2, Folder 25, MCJWP.

¹⁵⁷ Florence Garnette to Lelia Walker Robinson, n.d., Box 2 Folder 24, MCJWP.

¹⁵⁸ R.W. Thompson to Freeman B. Ransom, May 26, 1919, Box 2, Folder 28, MCJWP.

¹⁵⁹ J.C. Napier to Freeman B. Ransom, May 28, 1919, Box 2, Folder 27, MCJWP.

Walker Company revered its founder and held her up as an example to employees and customers alike. Walker's likeness and name continued to grace product labels, publications, and advertisements for the company for decades. The rituals of the Walker clubs reinforced Walker's life story as a model for agents to emulate, and the training manuals of the Walker beauty schools opened by recounting Walker's story, celebrating her philanthropy, and challenging new beauty culturists to be loyal to the woman, the brand, and the company. However, Walker's legacy did not belong to the company. It became bigger. It belonged to the race.

In the 1920s and 1930s, Revella Hughes, a leading African American soprano and pianist who performed with Paul Robeson, Eubie Blake, and Marian Anderson, sang a popular song named for Madam Walker. In the 1930s and 40s, African American author Zora Neale Hurston wrote a novel based on Walker's life entitled *The Golden Bench of God*.¹⁶⁰ In the 1930s, Duke Ellington first developed the idea for an opera based on Madam Walker's life. In the 1960s, he began developing it as a production for public television, but by the time of his death in 1974, *Queenie Pie* was unfinished. Subsequent musicians attempted to finish the opera with varying degrees of success, but in 2014 a rendition of it was produced at the Chicago Opera Theater.

Roots author Alex Haley was fascinated with Walker's life and began research for a book in the 1980s. He died without having finished his research or written his book. However, Tananarive Due, an African American fiction writer, resumed Haley's research and published a historical novel about Walker in 2000 based on his research called *The Black Rose*. Dozens of plays have been produced during the past forty years about

¹⁶⁰ Robert Wayne Croft, *A Zora Neale Hurston Companion* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2002), 53. The novel was never published and its manuscript was reportedly lost in a fire.

Walker's life through local and regional theater companies, the latest of which was *Madam—A Musical on the Life of Madam C.J. Walker*, which has played in New York and Atlanta, Georgia, during the past several years. And, since 2011, entertainment media has speculated that Oscar Award-winning actress Queen Latifah would play Madam Walker in an upcoming motion picture. Across all of these representations, Walker's generosity has been acknowledged and celebrated. Whether she was a penniless migrant widow who raised money for an indigent neighbor in St. Louis or an internationally known entrepreneur on the cusp of becoming a millionaire, Walker gave as she was able to the people and institutions dearest to her and which represented her deepest aspirations for the eventual uplift of the race.

Conclusion

Walker may not have imagined her legacy having such penetrating and enduring impact, but she left a blueprint for it. Ransom's philanthropy letter depicted Walker's generosity, shortly after her company began to thrive, as multi-channeled, practical, versatile, and focused on education and social services as means for racial uplift. By adopting the ethos of her fellow black clubwomen, Walker used her philanthropy to advance opportunities for black women whose success was a conduit for racial uplift. She used the diverse resources at her disposal to be of service. In particular, her gifts to black colleges that focused on curriculum development represented her broad-based view of the ways in which commercial and philanthropic goals could not only coexist in a particular effort, but could also reinforce each other for maximum benefit to the black colleges, the Walker Company, and, ultimately, to the race. Her testamentary documents revealed that

her *memento mori* moments enhanced her generosity and led to increased provisions for gifts to individuals and institutions, again in service to the race. Many of her gifts to individuals included provisions for proper burial, which was historically a use for black philanthropy, as well as cash payments to help her African American loved ones, business associates, and friends navigate a perpetually hostile society that limited opportunities to earn a living and greatly restricted freedoms. Consequently, the oft-used primary sources that have provided lists of Walker's cash gifts have yielded far more. As a result of Ransom's philanthropy letter and her testamentary documents, we can understand Walker's philanthropy on her own terms. Walker herself captured it best when she closed letters to the black colleges by writing "I am yours for the highest development of the race."¹⁶¹

¹⁶¹ Madam Walker to Normal Industrial and Agricultural College of Pensacola, FL March 27, 1917, Box 1, Folder 7, MCJWP.

CHAPTER FOUR:
MADAM C.J. WALKER'S GOSPEL OF GIVING

“I am unlike your white friends
who have waited until they were rich and then help.”
–Madam C.J. Walker to Booker T. Washington (1914)¹

Madam C.J. Walker's relationship with Booker T. Washington, the famous race leader and principal of Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, has been widely recounted by her biographers and scholars.² Faced with Washington's initial rejection in 1911, due to his complicated views on women, hairdressing, and cosmetics, Walker eventually overcame his stubbornness through a relentless campaign involving personal letter writing, networking with mutual acquaintances, and gift-giving to Tuskegee. Within four years, the once evasive Washington was posing in pictures with Walker and even made beauty culture a theme of his annual National Negro Business League (NNBL) conference in 1915. There, Walker stood shoulder to shoulder, literally and figuratively, with the man she most revered.

The most famous incident involving the two was Walker's commandeering of the floor, to Washington's surprise, at his 1912 NNBL annual meeting in which she asserted the right to speak to his audience and delivered a powerful speech about her life and work on behalf of the race. The shocked Washington ceded the floor, but, after Walker finished

¹ Madam Walker to Booker T. Washington, May 5, 1914, Louis Harlan and Raymond Smock, ed., *The Booker T. Washington Papers*, Vol. 13: 1914-1915 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 14.

² See Darlene Clark Hine, *Speak Truth to Power: Black Professional Class in United States History* (Brooklyn, NY: Carlson Publishing, 1996); Kate Dossett, *Bridging Race Divides: Black Nationalism, Feminism, and Integration in the United States, 1896-1935* (Tallahassee: University Press of Florida, 2008); Erin D. Chapman, *Prove it On Me: New Negroes, Sex, and Popular Culture in the 1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); A'Lelia Bundles, *On Her Own Ground: The Life and Times of Madam C.J. Walker* (New York: Washington Square Press, 2001); Beverly Lowry, *Her Dream of Dreams: The Rise and Triumph of Madam C.J. Walker* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003).

speaking, he quickly moved onto the next agenda item with little acknowledgement of her presentation. The experience was a defining moment in Walker's life and the speech she delivered, which is one of the few for which there is a surviving transcript, has been integral to her legacy as a black female entrepreneur. However, there was another and lesser-known exchange between the two that is equally clarifying in terms of how Walker defined her own philanthropy.

During spring 1914, Walker had written to Washington to propose the idea of making a \$300 scholarship gift to provide \$50.00 each for five students to attend Tuskegee's Day School, and \$50.00 for the general operations of the Institute. Apparently, Washington had responded to the idea in a manner that caused Walker to think that her prospective gift would not be as helpful as she had intended and that more money would have been required to have her desired effect. In her reply to Washington, she retorted, "I thought by giving scholarships to Tuskegee students I was not only helping the student[s] but the school as well. If these scholarships do not help the school I have missed my mark."³ She went on to state that she was unable to cover the full cost of attendance for five students at that time, but had hoped that the \$50.00 each would have been useful. Later in the letter, she referenced an ongoing conversation between them about Tuskegee adopting her beauty culture curriculum.⁴ Walker proffered that if Washington agreed and the program was successful, "I could not only give hundreds of dollars to Tuskegee but [t]housands of dollars."⁵ She wanted Washington to understand

³ Madam Walker to Booker T. Washington, May 5, 1914, Louis Harlan and Raymond Smock, ed., *The Booker T. Washington Papers*, Vol. 13: 1914-1915 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 14.

⁴ See Chapter 3 for a discussion of Walker's philanthropic gifts to black colleges for adoption of her beauty culture curriculum.

⁵ Madam Walker to Booker T. Washington, May 5, 1914, Louis Harlan and Raymond Smock, ed., *The Booker T. Washington Papers*, Vol. 13: 1914-1915 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 14.

both the limits and the potential of her financial support because, while she had aimed to do more, she had to start with what she saw as feasible at the time.

In her letter, she described her business as being large, but noted that its increased size had incurred greater expenses. The implication was for Washington not to assume that she had unlimited means nor to be fooled by appearances. He was used to interacting with the leading white industrial magnates of the time, whom he approached regularly for financial support and to serve on his board, and who sought him regularly for counsel on matters of race. Walker knew the company Washington kept, and strove to set the record straight so he would have appropriate expectations and accord her due respect. In a direct declaration, Walker then had pointedly informed Washington, “I am unlike your white friends who have waited until they were rich and then help, but have in proportion to my success I have reached out and am helping others.”⁶ Washington’s “white friends” included the most famous member of Tuskegee’s board, Andrew Carnegie, who had single-handedly seeded Tuskegee’s endowment with \$600,000 on top of tens of thousands of dollars in other donations.⁷ In his response, Washington declined the offer of curriculum by citing his board’s disapproval of the idea, but, regarding her donation, conceded, “What you send will certainly help [the students] in a most satisfactory and appreciable way.”⁸ Walker had demanded that Washington understand and respect her as a donor, and, in the end, he did.⁹

⁶ Madam Walker to Booker T. Washington, May 5, 1914, Louis Harlan and Raymond Smock, ed., *The Booker T. Washington Papers*, Vol. 13: 1914-1915 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 14.

⁷ “\$600,000 for Tuskegee and B.T. Washington,” *The New York Times*, April 24, 1903.

⁸ Booker T. Washington to Madam Walker, May 22, 1914, Louis Harlan and Raymond Smock, ed., *The Booker T. Washington Papers*, Vol. 13: 1914-1915 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 30.

⁹ While Washington maintained his resistance to the curriculum proposal, the Institute apparently relented as Walker reported in 1917 that Tuskegee had adopted her curriculum after his death.

This exchange between Walker and Washington is a defining moment for understanding Walker's philanthropy and its significance. She effectively staked her position in the philanthropic landscape of early twentieth century America. Her voice has travelled down through history to challenge our thinking that the seemingly appropriate comparisons to other leading philanthropists of her era are the best way to understand her giving. This directive was particularly important because it has been tempting to compare Walker to Andrew Carnegie in order to contextualize her philanthropy. Scholars have viewed him as the archetypal philanthropist of the era, and his presence and activities have represented historical markers for the evolution of philanthropy in America. This comparison is problematic, however, because it yields specious conclusions. When Walker is compared to Carnegie, she emerges either as a great exemplar of his philosophy of *Wealth*¹⁰ because she felt a responsibility to use her affluence to help the less fortunate, or as a poor contrast because her total giving was an infinitesimal fraction of Carnegie's. However, Walker's sense of obligation to others did not originate with her acquisition of wealth; it was inculcated and acted upon earlier in her life when she had meager resources. Furthermore, a numbers-based comparison has limited use beyond a sorting or ranking function. And so, both points lack nuance to properly position Walker's giving.

Or instead of Carnegie, we might turn to New York's Olivia Sage,¹¹ the prototypical female donor of the period, to contextualize Walker. This analogy may seem appropriate because both were wealthy, female philanthropists. They were contemporaries who used their wealth to support social and educational causes; they

¹⁰ Andrew Carnegie, "Wealth," *North American Review* 148, 391 (June, 1889): 653-664.

¹¹ Ruth Crocker, *Mrs. Russell Sage: Women's Activism and Philanthropy in Gilded Age and Progressive Era America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006).

simultaneously resided in the same state for a short time; and they died within one year of each other. However, this juxtaposition equally falls short because, although they shared the same gender, it was inheritance, race, and class that gave Sage a starkly different historical experience that does not explain Walker as a philanthropist. As a woman, Walker *created*—rather than inherited—her wealth to rise out of poverty to a higher social status. Furthermore, she was still black and female, a combination that has been distinctive in American history. Her specific social experience—along with its historical consequences—must be understood on its own terms.

This study is the first to place Walker’s philanthropy at the center of analysis to understand the role it played in the life of this prominent American figure. This investigation has built upon our existing knowledge of the causes she supported by developing and contextualizing in greater depth the motivations for and influences upon her giving. Articulating these originating motivations and influences has yielded clear patterns across her giving that are explained by her early experiences as a poor, black, female migrant in St. Louis, Missouri, during the late 1800s, dependent upon a robust philanthropic infrastructure of black civil society as well as the individuals who mentored her and cared for her during the most difficult time of her life. These life experiences explained the making of Madam C.J. Walker the philanthropist. Sarah Breedlove was generous in her own way, by serving in her church and helping neighbors. Madam Walker’s philanthropy was an extension and escalation of Sarah’s giving. Sarah did not have the wherewithal to act in broad, organized ways; but Walker did, and she owed this ability to the dreams and persistence of Sarah.

Sarah's early life experiences of being in need and being helped by others with greater means formed Madam Walker's moral imagination and provided the foundation for her philanthropic commitment to racial uplift via social services and education. Walker never forgot the women of St. Paul AME Church's Mite Missionary Society, who embraced Sarah and quickly connected her with the resources she needed to survive and, ultimately, thrive. These resources included the local orphans' home which cared for Sarah's daughter, and set Lelia on a path that eventually led to college and created the conditions for her to have more options in life than being a washerwoman like her mother.

The social gospel and cultural narratives of the AME Church were also important resources that inspired Sarah with their emphases on self-help, racial uplift, entrepreneurship, property ownership, achievement, international awareness, and social action all within context of the teachings of Jesus Christ. The AME Church was owned, operated, and funded exclusively by African Americans, and its reach stretched not only across the country, but overseas. It represented the potential of the race and the possibility of black institutions to serve their communities; thus, Sarah converted from her Baptist childhood and became a lifelong member of the AME Church. Walker felt a religious duty to give and spoke about her giving in scriptural terms. That said, the AME Church did not emerge as a major object of Walker's philanthropy. While she had supported the Mite Missionary Society continuously, she did not appear to significantly donate to or otherwise engage the vast resources of the AME Church as part of her giving. Walker may have felt that the AME Church had sufficient resources, a reality that caused her also to restrain some of her giving to Tuskegee Institute, which she viewed as having ample

funding. Or perhaps she was only interested in funding the women's auxiliary activities since they were her point of affinity. Or, she may have viewed her gifts to the Mite Missionary Society, the St. Louis Colored Orphans' Home, and the old folks' home as indirectly supporting the AME Church since St. Paul AME Church anchored that network of organizations. Regardless of the reasons why the AME Church itself did not figure more largely into Walker's list of recipients, the women of the AME Church were omnipresent on the list and her gifts reflected Walker's gratitude toward them.

As part of the church, Sarah was exposed to black women who were educated, generous, and active in their communities. These churchwomen and clubwomen modeled the practices and traditions of giving, serving, and leading that undergirded the proliferation of black social and philanthropic institutions that occurred following emancipation in response to the failure of Reconstruction and the rise of Jim Crow. Whether locally through the Mite Missionary Society or nationally through NACW, these black women shaped their families and communities in ways that defied the dominant white society's narratives about black inferiority and helplessness. These women socialized Sarah into the manner and being of black women's giving as a way of life. It was for these reasons that the *Indianapolis Freeman* described these St. Louis women and organizations as "shareholders in [Walker's] bounty."¹² Under their tutelage, Sarah, who was an orphan, a widow, and poor (all three of the vulnerable populations that the Bible identifies as deserving of care and assistance¹³), had transitioned from being a recipient to a donor in realization of her own philanthropic agency and capacity to help others regardless of the extent of her resources. This realization was integral because it

¹² "The Life Work of Mme. C.J. Walker," *Indianapolis Freeman*, December 26, 1914, p. 1.

¹³ Deuteronomy 10:18; Isaiah 1:17; Psalms 68:5; Psalms 82:3; 1 Timothy 5:3; James 1:27; Galatians 2:10.

set the tone for Walker's philanthropic life, one in which she would give along the way—that is, give gradually and incrementally to help others as she could with what she had—rather than focus her life's energies on wealth creation and later, near life's end after she had secured her own means, arrive at a sense of responsibility toward others.

Walker took the example of her black female mentors and translated it into a gospel of giving based on three tenets: 1) give as you can to be helpful to others; 2) spare no useful means that may be helpful to others; and 3) give more as your means increase to help others. It was this gospel of giving that inspired Walker's admonition to Booker T. Washington on how to understand her as a donor in relation to the wealthy white donors he knew. She was different and wanted to be respected as such. While Walker had learned and had begun practicing the first tenet of this gospel of giving in St. Louis, she applied the second tenet—spare no useful means that may be helpful to others—and the third tenet—give more as your means increase to help others—through her company and the diverse types of gifts she made across her lifetime and afterwards. She had created and operated her company to pursue commercial and philanthropic goals concurrently by improving black women's personal hygiene and appearance; increasing their access to vocational education, beauty culture careers, and financial independence; and promoting social bonding and activism through associationalism, and, later, fraternal ritual as the idea of Walker was perpetuated by the MCJWMC.

In African American philanthropy, giving has historically found expression through multiple channels, traditional and untraditional. Walker deployed monetary and non-monetary gifts, such as time, but she also gave employment, education, pride in personal appearance, inspiration, food, and other tangible goods. Consequently, her

agents, company, and life story stood alongside her time and money as key philanthropic resources put in service to racial uplift. She expanded the ways in which she gave according to the growth in means she experienced. Her last will and codicil then became tools for ensuring that these gifts were continued in their various forms and were complemented by new ones, such as real estate and provisions for the proper and dignified burial of family and friends. After her death in 1919, the *idea of Walker* accrued significant value and meaning as the MCJWMC used her legacy to inculcate philanthropic values into its agents and beauty school students, and engage its customers. However, her legacy was larger than the company could ever imagine as African Americans embraced Walker as a cultural hero whose life story was a gift of inspiration to successive generations.

These gifts positioned Walker as a catalytic giver who sought to inspire and engage others by modeling giving and philanthropic sensibilities in support of individual development, racial uplift, and social change. She used the means available to her to give gifts that had made opportunity and hope accessible to everyday African Americans so they could fulfill their potential in spite of horrific and unfair circumstances; which, in turn, moved America closer toward the country it purported to be. Her kind of catalytic philanthropy placed her into a variety of roles that expand our understanding of giving: a *donor* who gave money, time, goods, services, and support to people and organizations in need; an *educator* who prepared and credentialed black women for careers and continually urged them in their quest for self-improvement; a *speaker/storyteller* who motivated others through her own narrative of ascent and challenged them to see themselves in her story and take action toward self and community improvement; an

organizer who knew the collective power of women and enabled their mobilization on behalf of their communities; a *convener* who gathered and hosted race leaders to discuss the problems of the race and strategize opportunities for action; an *employer* of the unemployable who offered opportunity and hope through the dignity of work; and a *sharer* who knew the joy of giving and was bountiful in her interactions with others. These philanthropic roles were how Walker embodied and operationalized her gospel of giving as an expression of her character.

This gospel of giving was vital to Walker's identity as a woman. It was through her philanthropy that Walker blended her identity as a churchwoman, clubwoman, race woman, and businesswoman with that of being a mother and a friend. Through her giving, Walker expressed her greatest aspirations for herself, her race, and her gender. She affirmed the dignity and humanity of African Americans by directly and indirectly providing much needed social services, and economic and educational opportunities so they could navigate a treacherous racialized landscape. Through her philanthropy, she connected women to each other through associationalism to bond with each other and leverage their power in support of common goals of a better life for themselves and their communities. She affirmed her relational bonds with family, friends, and community by making provisions for their continued opportunity and care after her death. Together, these actions created a philanthropy that enabled Walker to celebrate social relationships and define her public role and voice in the liberation of African Americans.

Part of the power of this gospel of giving can be attributed to its grounding in black women's identification with and close proximity to suffering. Iris Carlton-LaNey and Sandra Carlton Alexander have shown how black clubwomen in the early twentieth

century had “physical, social and psychological proximity to the individuals for whom they advocated.”¹⁴ This “nearness” enabled them “to maintain first-hand information about community problems and issues,” and, thus yielded authentic and careful perspectives on local needs.¹⁵ Virtually all of Walker’s gifts harkened back to some type of gift she once needed or received herself. When she employed the unemployable, she had likely remembered the struggles of being both locked out of jobs and locked into menial, unprofitable work because of racism and sexism. When she organized her agents into clubs, she had already participated in similar networks through the Court of Calanthe, the AME Church, and the NACW. When she gave holiday turkeys to poor families, she had experienced hunger and the accompanying anxieties of not being able to feed her child. When she funded scholarships at schools such as Tuskegee Institute and Palmer Memorial Institute, she had lived with the pain of her own ignorance as a formerly illiterate and unschooled teen mother. And, no matter how much money she accumulated nor how many properties she purchased, she was still black, still female, and, therefore, still subject to the racialized norms and gender dynamics of Jim Crow society. In this manner, she had the same philanthropic need for freedom as the most uneducated and unkempt among the newly arrived black migrants in any northern city at that time.

To be sure, her wealth gave her some insulation from racialized and gendered insult. For instance, her ownership of automobiles spared her the indignities of segregated

¹⁴ Iris Carlton-LaNey and Sandra Carlton Alexander, “Early African American Social Welfare Pioneers: Working to Empower the Race and the Community,” *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Diversity in Social Work* 10, 2 (June, 2001): 77.

¹⁵ Iris Carlton-LaNey and Sandra Carlton Alexander, “Early African American Social Welfare Pioneers: Working to Empower the Race and the Community,” *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Diversity in Social Work* 10, 2 (June, 2001): 77, 82.

train travel during her extensive promotional tours throughout the South and across the country. However, at any time, Walker could have been lynched, raped, harangued, belittled, humiliated, discriminated against, or otherwise terrorized just like any other black woman in America.¹⁶ Although many of Washington's white supporters had known poverty and ignorance in their earlier lives, they were rescued from that former station by their wealth, and the privileges of race accrued to them in those efforts. For them, such conditions remained only as memories that could be conjured or ignored at will. Walker could never fully escape the conditions imposed upon her life by virtue of her skin color and gender without radical social change. This reality has served as a defining characteristic of much of African American philanthropy.

In many ways, the history of African American philanthropy has been the search for hospitality in a land of hostility. Blacks used whatever means available to them to make life tolerable and navigable during the long-suffering and uncertain trek toward freedom and equality. This response was required due to the surging malevolence of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century white-controlled governments, markets, and voluntary associations that created and maintained the social, political, and economic conditions of black life. By denying legal protections, economic opportunities, and access to services—among other things—for blacks, these public and private societal actors and institutions perpetuated inequality and made life extraordinarily difficult for them. With their earlier hopes for Reconstruction demolished, blacks had to do for themselves in order to survive, as they had been doing since their arrival in America.

¹⁶ See Chapter 3 for a brief discussion of Walker's experience being discriminated against at the Isis Theater in Indianapolis, Indiana, and her subsequent lawsuit against the company.

Along the way, there was help. Sympathetic white allies provided much-needed support in various forms, from money and material items to school buildings and teachers. Somehow, these efforts took precedence in public perception and historical interpretation over those of African Americans themselves, who came to be viewed as only passive recipients of the largess and beneficence of whites.¹⁷ Over the past two decades, scholars have worked to correct this perception through research that has investigated and substantiated the philanthropic volition of African Americans; however, despite quality scholarship in this area, the perception still remains.

This study of Madam Walker as a philanthropist should be replicated for other black individuals to uncover their stories and approaches to giving in order to continue challenging the prevailing view. Black philanthropy research has emphasized black institutions such as the church and fraternal organizations or has viewed African Americans in the aggregate as part of movements or efforts for social change, such as the community-based fundraising campaigns to build Rosenwald schools in the South during the early twentieth century or the mid-twentieth century civil rights movement. It has not had a focus on individual agency.¹⁸ These institutions and movements have been important, but their examples need to be augmented with those of black individuals who used a variety of resources throughout history, including wealth, to be philanthropic.

Such research would accomplish at least two things. First, it would link names and faces to the historiography. As previously mentioned, black social institutions were

¹⁷ Adrienne Lash Jones, "Philanthropy in the African American Experience," *Giving: Western Ideas of Philanthropy*, ed. J. B. Schneewind (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 153, 159; Jayne R. Beilke, "Nineteenth-Century Traditions of Benevolence and Education: Toward a Conceptual Framework of Black Philanthropy," in *Uplifting a People: African American Philanthropy and Education*, ed. Marybeth Gasman and Kathrine Sedgwick (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), 10.

¹⁸ For movement in the direction of this research agenda, see Marybeth Gasman and Kathryn Sedgwick, ed. *Uplifting a People: African American Philanthropy and Education* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005).

extremely important, but they were operated by and for people. The stories and actions of the individuals who comprised, funded, participated in, and benefitted from these institutions will humanize the historiography as has been demonstrated by the field of black social welfare's attention to both individuals and institutions in its historical analysis. This approach will illuminate the agency and efficacy of a group long thought—incorrectly and, in many cases, maliciously—to possess neither. To be certain, there are numerous biographies of black historical figures; however, more specific investigations of individual black philanthropists—broadly defined—are needed to connect their stories to the fields of African American studies and philanthropic studies so that the former can advance its project of identifying and examining this neglected experience, and the latter can more accurately comprehend and portray philanthropy as a human phenomenon. In the process, the interconnectedness of black social institutions will be further exposed through the relationships between the individuals, as evidenced in this study by Walker's social networks and her introduction to the orphanage, old folks' home, Court of Calanthe, and NACW through the St. Paul AME Church's Mite Missionary Society, which funded or provided members for each organization. What is more, researching individual black philanthropists provides critical insights that challenge current perceptions and understandings of voluntary action, and enriches historical debates, as this study has demonstrated through discussion of Madam Walker's funding of industrial education.

Second, research on individual black philanthropists, particularly those who included money as part of their voluntary action, will shed light on how blacks have historically used money as a resource in their philanthropic quest for freedom and in their

post-civil rights era quest for integration and opportunity. Much of the work that has been done on African American philanthropy has developed under the research rubric of giving not finding significant expression through money, but through other means. The value of this approach has been widely demonstrated; however, as Paul Mullins *et al.* have observed, wealth was not “white-exclusive.”¹⁹ This approach, therefore, begs several questions. When, how, and for what purposes did black philanthropy find expression through money? How did black individuals use their money, in tandem with numerous other resources, to be philanthropic? Pursuing these questions will invariably lead to further examples of black aggregate giving, such as the aforementioned Rosenwald school campaigns or the ways in which black churches, schools, and fraternal organizations sustained themselves, which we must know more about, but it will also lead to more examples like Madam Walker. It is tempting to think of Walker as an anomalous figure within her community, but she was not. This study has shown how Walker’s giving was black women’s giving writ large. She took the philanthropic practices of her black clubwomen and churchwomen mentors and supporters, and amplified them. This recognition not only contextualizes Walker, but provides clues for further research. There were other black women philanthropists about whom we need to know.

Viewing Walker as a prototypical black female philanthropist of her time guides us to others like her and enriches our understanding of how women have historically used philanthropy in their lives and communities. As Tiffany Gill has observed, “Philanthropy was at the center of the way beauty culturists voiced their strength and dignity to the

¹⁹ Paul Mullins, Modupe Labode, Lewis Jones, Michael Essex, Alex Kruse, and G. Brandon Muncy, “Consuming Lines of Difference: The Politics of Wealth and Poverty along the Color Line,” *Historical Archeology* 45, 3 (2011): 148.

black community.”²⁰ Studying Madam Walker as philanthropist leads to the other philanthropic mesdames of black beauty culture, Annie Malone (1869-1957) and Sarah Spencer Washington (1889-1953). Neither of these women has received significant biographical treatment, but the extant research reveals that both operated philanthropically in ways similar to and different from Walker. As a black woman who formally studied chemistry and was also orphaned as a child, Annie “Madam Poro” Malone created the Poro Company in Lovejoy, Illinois, in 1900 to sell her beauty culture products, and moved the company to St. Louis in 1902. She eventually employed tens of thousands of black women as agents, ran a string of beauty schools under the Poro College brand, built a multi-purpose factory building that provided educational and community programming, organized her agents into local and national clubs, and donated tens of thousands of dollars in service to racial uplift. In fact, Malone financially supported the orphan’s home that housed and cared for Lelia Walker in the 1890s and continued to do so for many decades.²¹ As previously mentioned in this study, Sarah Breedlove worked for Malone for a short time while living in St. Louis before she developed her own products.

Sarah Spencer Washington, also known as Madam Washington, launched the Apex News and Hair Company in Atlantic City, New Jersey, in 1920 after she had opened a hairdressing business seven years prior. She eventually employed tens of thousands of black women as well, and opened beauty schools across the country under

²⁰ Tiffany Gill, *Beauty Shop Politics: African American Women’s Activism in the Beauty Industry* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 45.

²¹ Poro College, “Poro” in *Pictures: With a Short History of its Development* (St. Louis, MO: Poro College, 1926); “Annie Malone turns 125,” accessed August 4, 2014 http://www.stlamerican.com/black_history/article_1de145fc-70bf-11e2-b7f2-0019bb2963f4.html#.URQfiirZflU.gmail.; Today, that institution still exists in St. Louis and is named the Annie Malone Children and Family Service Center.

the Apex moniker. She competed strenuously with the Poro and Walker companies. Her enterprise included a publishing company, a drug company, and a laboratory for the clinical development of products. Her philanthropy reportedly found expression through the creation of a nursing home for the black aged, a golf course open to all people (after she experienced being denied the opportunity to play because of her skin color), and the provision of coal for poor families to heat their residences.²² Primary sources related to these women and their companies sit in Chicago, Illinois, and Atlantic City, New Jersey, awaiting excavation to inform the study of philanthropy.²³

By understanding black women as philanthropists, we increase our understanding of women as philanthropists. Presently, the experiences of elite white women dominate the field of women's philanthropy.²⁴ Their example has provided a useful start, but this scope must be broadened in order for the field to be true to its appellation. Cheryl Smith's admonishment that, "gender is not always unifying,"²⁵ reminds us of the need to account for variations among women's experiences which can be done best by engaging women

²² "Sarah Spencer Washington," accessed August 4, 2014 http://www.atlanticcityexperience.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=13:madame-washington&catid=6&Itemid=11; "Washington, Sarah Spencer," accessed August 3, 2014 from [; Gladys L. Porter, *Three Negro Pioneers in Beauty Culture* \(New York: Vantage Press, 1966\).](http://www.fofweb.com/History/HistRefMain.asp?iPin=AABLE0148&SID=2&DatabaseName=African-American+History+Online&InputText=%22Madame+C+J+Walker%22&SearchStyle=&dTitle=Washington%2C+Sarah+Spencer&TabRecordType=Biography&BioCountPass=14&SubCountPass=11&DocCountPass=0&ImgCountPass=1&MapCountPass=0&FedCountPass=&MedCountPass=1&NewsCountPass=0&RecPosition=8&AmericanData=&WomenData=&AFHCData=Set&IndianData=&WorldData=&AncientData=&GovernmentData=)

²³ Annie Malone's papers are located in the Robert O. French Papers of the Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection at the Chicago Public Library in Illinois. French was Malone's nephew and worked for her company for a time. He preserved many of Malone's original documents. Collections and exhibits related to Sarah Spencer Washington are located at the Atlantic City Free Public Library in New Jersey.

²⁴ Bernice Kert, *Abby Aldrich Rockefeller: The Woman in the Family* (New York: Random House, 1993); Kathleen D. McCarthy, *Women's Culture: American Philanthropy and Art, 1830-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Ruth Crocker, *Mrs. Russell Sage: Women's Activism and Philanthropy in Gilded Age and Progressive Era America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006); Sylvia Hoffert, *Alva Vanderbilt Belmont: Unlikely Champion of Women's Rights* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012).

²⁵ Cheryl A. Smith, *Market Women: Black Women Entrepreneurs: Past, Present, and Future* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2005), 9.

of different backgrounds as historical subjects. For example, the concept of “parallel political structures” has been used to describe the ways in which middle-class or elite white women created their own voluntary institutional forms in response to the constraints imposed upon them based on prevailing views of the domestic sphere of the home as women’s domain and of the public sphere outside the home as men’s domain. Consequently, as McCarthy has argued, white women created voluntary organizations that were “outside the domestic, commercial, and political spheres dominated by men,” in order to create public spaces for women’s voices and advocacy.²⁶ This framework has yielded great insights, but Walker’s company may challenge it because she did not create a parallel structure, but rather a parity structure. Black women’s historical experience created a different gender dynamic with respect to work outside the home even as some of the traditional gender constraints were evident in black households, institutions, and communities. When Walker wrested control of the floor at Booker T. Washington’s 1912 NNBL meeting of mostly black businessmen, she was demanding respect as an equal in that realm. She was not following a similar course at some distance with no plans or means to intersect. She wanted and received recognition as an important, profitable black business entity doing well for the race. She competed with both male and female business operators. Further, the mixed commercial and philanthropic purposes of her company created a platform that enabled her to engage male and female black leaders—such as Marcus Garvey, W.E.B. Du Bois, Booker T. Washington, Mary McCleod Bethune, Nannie Helen Burroughs, and Ida B. Wells—as equals. Such an example, which was not

²⁶ Kathleen McCarthy, “Women and Political Culture,” in *Charity, Philanthropy, and Civility in American History* ed. Lawrence Friedman and Mark McGarvie (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 179; Kathleen McCarthy, “Parallel Power Structures: Women in the Voluntary Sphere,” in Kathleen McCarthy, ed. *Lady Bountiful Revisited: Women, Philanthropy, and Power* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1990): 23.

an anomaly, but rather standard practice in black beauty culture, has much to offer the field of women's philanthropy.

By deepening our understanding of the philanthropy of African Americans and women, an analysis of Madam Walker ultimately helps us better grasp American philanthropy. We have not seen a woman like Walker before in the major historical narratives of philanthropy in America—that is, the independently wealthy, philanthropic woman who *created*, rather than inherited, her wealth and who maintained life-long proximity to the conditions she sought to improve through her giving. When confronted with an opportunity to give, Walker, as one interviewer noted, became “the unfolding woman, growing at the approach; not receding, getting smaller in all ways, as so many do.”²⁷ She gave directly to individuals to alleviate their suffering, and she gave through networks and institutions to foster systemic change. Along the conceptual continuum of philanthropic history anchored by the elite giving of the wealthiest of American white men on one end and by the retail giving of the masses on the other,²⁸ we would find Walker somewhere in the middle complicating views on the responsibilities of wealth holders and challenging traditional notions of what constitutes a gift.

Hers was not a gospel of giving birthed to rationalize a political and economic system that made substantial wealth creation by the relative few possible or to assuage someone's guilt over having accumulated more resources than most others. This was not a gospel of giving prompted by a new realization that one had more resources than one could possibly and reasonably consume or by a sudden, or even expected, influx of inheritance that created new possibilities. This was a gospel of giving forged directly

²⁷ “America's Foremost Colored Woman,” *Indianapolis Freeman*, December 28, 1912.

²⁸ Olivier Zunz, *Philanthropy in America: A History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 2.

from the collective experience of black women in confrontation with the absurdity of American racial and gender oppression. As such, it created impact over time, it assumed various forms and functions, and it found its fullest expression and maximum effect in partnership with the giving of others. It expressed black women's identity, dignity, agency, and humanity as they chose their constructive responses to seemingly destructive and impossible circumstances.

Walker's gospel of giving was grounded in the tradition of self-help as practiced by African Americans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Adrienne Lash Jones urged a rethinking of the term self-help in relation to black giving as an obstructive, dismissive, and unfair moniker with little utility for identifying philanthropic actions and actors in the African American experience.²⁹ Her corrective proffered a broad, non-monetary-based definition of philanthropy and assigned benevolence as the prevailing impetus for all giving. In contrast, this study has shown that instead of obscuring black philanthropic action, self-help can be applied more broadly in fruitful ways to make it more perceptible. Self-help led directly to Madam Walker's philanthropic action when it was contextualized as part of a broadened definition of philanthropy. The results revealed an array of activities—such as employment and education—that met social needs. Further, this study has shown that motives for giving are important and must be distinguished in order to truly comprehend the actions of philanthropists. Benevolence as an across-the-board motive is insufficient for the task. Uncovering Madam Walker's moral imagination transformed our understanding of her philanthropic gifts and of the importance of St. Louis and Indianapolis in her giving. And so, rather than rendering

²⁹ Adrienne Lash Jones, "Philanthropy in the African American Experience" in *Giving: Western Ideas of Philanthropy*, ed. J.B. Schneewind (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996):153-178.

black philanthropy “inconsequential,” as Jones asserted, self-help has actually elucidated its magnitude and significance.³⁰

As a manifestation of a self-help cultural tradition of interdependence, collective responsibility, and inclusiveness,³¹ Walker’s gospel of giving is instructive for those interested in the broader lessons of history. It proffers that giving is a personal and community responsibility that commences with birth rather than at some later point in life when one’s resources reach surplus status. It recognizes that the giver has also received much throughout life, and that the giver and the recipient can be the same. It holds that no one is too close to or too far from the giver for a philanthropic gift to be made—including blood relations, extended family, and strangers. It does not distinguish between spheres of action to bring about social change because, ultimately, all available means—private and public—must be pursued in order to be successful because of the pervasiveness and depth of need. It promotes cooperation and collaboration in order to magnify and multiply the impact of giving. It views virtually any resource that has potential to alleviate suffering or bring about meaningful change in overcoming personal and societal obstacles as being useful philanthropic currency—be it time, money, employment, education, beauty, influence, inspiration, or tangible goods. Finally, Walker’s gospel of giving holds that giving should be known and celebrated so as to model generosity and inspire others to action. In this light, it has become clear that Walker, as a historical figure, was more than just another rich person who donated money or another African American who helped fight racism or another woman who helped other women. Her

³⁰ Adrienne Lash Jones, “Philanthropy in the African American Experience” in *Giving: Western Ideas of Philanthropy*, ed. J.B. Schneewind (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 154-155.

³¹ Cheryl Hall-Russell and Robert Kasberg, *African American Traditions of Giving and Serving: A Midwest Perspective* (Indianapolis: The Center on Philanthropy at Indiana University, 1997), 4.

inclusion in American philanthropic history changes not only the complexion and shape of its narratives, but also the tone and scope of the field's conversations on what constitutes voluntary action, what comprises the public good, and how voluntary action functions in service to the public good.

This study has provided analysis of Walker's philanthropy rather than basic descriptions of it. We have long had *descriptions* of Walker's philanthropy, but lacked an *assessment* of its origins, substance, and meaning. This study has illuminated the motivations for and constitution of Walker's giving in ways that have built upon the foundation of extant Walker literature by asking different questions, engaging new and existing primary sources, and extending analysis of those primary sources farther than has been done previously. This approach—which is grounded in the emerging field of philanthropic studies—has, in turn, enabled not only an interpretation of Walker's significance as a philanthropist, but also supplied broader insights into the molding influences of race, class, and gender in the American heritage of philanthropy.

Rather than viewing philanthropic studies simply as a topic, this dissertation has used it as a method for examining Walker's generosity. This study has created a framework for inquiry from concepts central to philanthropic studies. The concept of the moral imagination³² undergirded Chapter One's investigation of the origins of and motivations for Madam Walker's giving. The idea of the historical blurring of the lines between for-profit, government, and nonprofit voluntary action³³ in meeting social needs informed Chapter Two's interpretation of the Walker Company as a commercial and

³² Robert Payton and Michael Moody, *Understanding Philanthropy: Its Meaning and Mission* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 132.

³³ Kathleen McCarthy, *American Creed: Philanthropy and the Rise of Civil Society 1700-1865* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 4, 5.

philanthropic institution. The field's purview of philanthropy as including more than money³⁴ guided Chapter Three's investigation into the diversity of Walker's giving. In total, new questions were brought to bear on primary and secondary sources familiar to those who study Walker in order to reinterpret her as a historical philanthropic actor. These questions originated from a nuanced perspective on philanthropy as a complex human phenomenon central to society rather than tangential. What is more, this study's method employed untapped primary sources, enlisted different historiographies, and applied varied techniques to produce this new interpretation of Walker.

As a multidisciplinary field committed to placing philanthropy at the center of analysis as a worthy and important subject of inquiry; philanthropic studies encourages interdisciplinary conversations and cross-fertilization in order to understand philanthropy as a human phenomenon. The field's interdisciplinary orientation enabled engagement of literatures on black business, black women, black social welfare, and wills along with historical methods and methods for analyzing testamentary documents to approach Walker's philanthropy. In the process, this study has shown how black business historiography serves as a conduit for examining black philanthropy, and that the history of black wealth is a missing, yet important, component of African American and American philanthropy that must be uncovered. This study provides further evidence of the need for greater use of wills as a source for understanding African American philanthropy, specifically, and charitable giving, more generally. In order to enrich and invigorate its own perspectives and methods, philanthropic studies must continue reaching out and engaging with fields that currently operate outside its sphere of

³⁴ Robert Payton and Michael Moody, *Understanding Philanthropy: Its Meaning and Mission* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 27-61.

influence, but that use black voluntary action to explore other intellectual interests. By being in conversation with these and other fields, and learning from their insights, philanthropic studies will be better able to refine its emerging method and substantiate its claims about the importance of philanthropy as a scholarly field.

In conclusion, this dissertation has moved us beyond simple lists of Madam C.J. Walker's gifts to a new, richer, deeper, more nuanced appreciation for Walker as a philanthropist. This study has presented the utility and meaning of her philanthropy rather than just its amounts and kind. Now, we understand how Walker became a philanthropist, in terms of the experiences and contexts that birthed her moral imagination and philanthropic ethos. We recognize how she operationalized her philanthropy through her company's processes, practices, and resources. We view philanthropy as integral to her sense of personal identity and development. We no longer have to settle for simple references to her \$1,000 gift to the YMCA or the charitable provisions of her will as summations of her giving. We can observe those actions within the context of her life and in the broader contexts of African American philanthropy, specifically, and American philanthropy, broadly. This study has produced the first analysis of Walker's testamentary documents to craft deeper meaning of their construction, constitution, and implementation in relation to her moral imagination. Through her provisions, Walker not only disposed of her property, but she marshaled her legacy. She left a blueprint of the personal and institutional relationships most dear to her, and most indicative of her highest hopes for her people—that they know the mercy of God, the love of family, the strength of community, and the value of education. Due to her relatively early death, the story of Walker's full philanthropic potential remains unknown, but it likely would have

continued along the trajectory of her gospel of giving by increasingly engaging the many resources at her disposal for the uplift of the race.

This study has contextualized Walker's philanthropy, on its own terms, by explaining it and grounding it within the broader field of philanthropic studies. It fills existing gaps in and enlarges the scope of the historiography that defines American philanthropy by staking claims for Madam Walker as a philanthropist and expanding the space and attention given to black women and African Americans as important philanthropic agents. Overall, by explaining Madam Walker's philanthropy, this study has contributed to our understanding of the historical influences of race, class, and gender on philanthropy; the various traditions of African American and American philanthropy; and the value of interdisciplinary philanthropic studies as an emerging field.

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