

About Her Business: Considered to be the first self-made female millionaire in America, Madame C. J. Walker (1867-1919) was born in poverty to former slaves in Louisiana. She experienced a challenging childhood, worked in the cotton fields, was orphaned at age six, moved in with a sister, but married at fourteen to escape abuse by her sister's husband. Widowed at twenty (speculation was her husband may have been lynched), she moved to St. Louis with her daughter and found work as a washerwoman.

After suffering hair loss in her twenties, she set about to create a line of hair-care products for America's black women. In 1905, with meager capital but a mega business plan, Walker created a hair-care and beauty empire that brought economic opportunity to black women whom she trained to be self-sufficient.

She took her business internationally to South America and the Caribbean where she trained agents in their shops instituting the first "franchise" style of business operations. She linked her business, wealth, and influence to activism, philanthropy, and racial advancement. "I want to say to every Negro woman don't sit down and wait for opportunities to come...get up and make them!"

~~~Born in the Jewish quarter of Kraków, Poland, Helena Rubinstein (1872-1965) was the oldest of seven sisters. Poor and 4'10" at age twenty-four, she boarded a ship to Australia, armed with twelve jars of cream and an inexhaustible supply of chutzpah also known as daring audacity, the willingness to be bold.

It took two months to reach Australia where she opened her first beauty institute in Melbourne in 1902, the year Australian women, the first in the world, obtained their right to vote. She was a firm supporter of women's equality and empowerment.

For her, "beauty" was a "new power." She introduced makeup as a means through which women could assert their independence. And, albeit she built a financial empire based on beauty achieved by making cosmetics accessible to all women, not just rich women, she claimed work was the best beauty treatment.

"Work has been indeed my best beauty treatment. I believe in hard work. It keeps the wrinkles out of the mind and the spirit. It helps to keep a woman young." She died at the age of 93 after amassing a fortune almost single-handedly, and was known to be one of the richest women in the world.

~~~The daughter of Jewish immigrants, Carrie Marcus Neiman (1883-1953) began her career in fashion and merchandising at twenty-one by working as a saleswoman for \$10 a week. Attentive to shoppers, she built up a strong clientele and received a healthy promotion. She soon became one of the highest-paid women in Dallas, and rapidly built a reputation in its fashion retailing business.

She co-opened Neiman Marcus in Dallas in 1907 with her brother and husband as a family business. Carrie did the buying with her brother, while her husband managed advertising and sales. At the time, clothes were made to order, each dress expensively and individually put together by dressmakers. Women of means would travel to New York or Europe for custom clothing. It was Carrie's goal to bring them to their store in Dallas.

While Carrie catered mostly to the women of means, she also introduced the

concept of buying ready-made clothes off the rack. Thus offering elegant, high fashion, ready-to-wear clothing that could be altered, which dramatically altered the cost of nice new clothes for women of not-so-wealthy means.

Carrie also was instrumental in the implementation of the store's fashion shows and the annual Neiman Marcus Fashion Award for outstanding fashion designers in 1938. She established the award to credit the work of behind the scenes designers and give them a public presence. This was at a time way before the Joan Rivers' "Who are you wearing?" question of current red carpet days.

Having had divorced her unfaithful husband and bought him out in 1928, when her brother died in 1950, she became Chair of Neiman Marcus. Dallas was the commercial hub of the southwest, and when oil made the city wealthy, Neiman-Marcus was positioned to serve the fashion needs of its newly rich women, of which Carrie now was one. She had transformed Dallas into an international fashion capital over which she presided.

~~~Born in rural Canada, Elizabeth Arden (1884-1966) rose from poverty to play a central role in the 20th century beauty business and built a \$20 million empire that defined success.

Her training and brief work as a nurse, introduced her to creams that treat burns. She employed chemists to develop her first hundreds of skin care products combing science and technology in the business of beauty.

She was the first to offer in-store makeovers and high-end spas, where clients could retreat from the world to be pampered and receive beauty treatments. She opened her first New York salon on Fifth Avenue in 1910 followed by a network of salons worldwide. Arden became the first woman to grace the cover of Time magazine, May 6, 1946.



In addition to being an entrepreneur, Arden was a suffragette. In 1912, she participated with 15,000 women in a march for women's rights. Suffragettes at the march wore red lipstick as a sign of solidarity—lipstick supplied by Arden. At her death in 1971, her company sold for \$38 million.

~~~ Born in China, Pauline lo Alker (1943 - ) fled with her family to Hong Kong in 1949 to escape the communist takeover. In a struggling refugee family her older brother, the first son and first grandson was the child of privilege in this Chinese family, while she dreamed of going to America. Her parents had intercepted her college acceptance letter

from Northwestern U offering her a full scholarship because, "They didn't want me to go unless my brother could go, too." Ultimately, both were accepted and attended Arizona State U.

Learning that as a foreign student she would not be able to get a teaching certificate, she had to choose how to make a living, and changed her major to mathematics. That required her to take several classes in the engineering department where she met and fell in love with ... the computer.

But upon graduating, no one would hire her, a foreign student, a woman in an emerging new male industry. Race or sex didn't enter her mind as possible culprits. "I was dumb enough not to [think about] that. I just thought it was bad luck. Sometimes I felt maybe I wasn't good enough." She had made good grades and her friends were getting offers. In the land of opportunity, she had none.

She continued with evening computer classes where she met a woman who worked precisely where Pauline dreamed about landing a job, in the computer department of General Electric. The woman told Pauline about a vacancy for a typist, and suggested she apply just to get her foot in the door.

Word processors were unheard of in those days everything was typed on IBM selectrics. "She said, 'do you know how to use one of those?'" "I said, 'no, but I will learn!' I rented a selectric practiced for a month, applied and got the job." The incident would turn around her life. After about a month, an opening did come up and she did get her dream job.

Subsequently, she was lured away from one company to another and another. In the male dominated Silicon Valley technology industry, she held the position of president and CEO in four different companies. She rescued a startup from probable extinction and turned it into an industry powerhouse valued at \$400 million. She started her own company in 1984 and in six years it was flourishing.

She was the first woman to become the president of AAMA, Asian American Manufacturers Association, one of the best-known professional organizations for Asian Americans. In Silicon Valley through AAMA, she set up programs, and organized and led workshops to teach young engineers, male and female, skills to become successful. Currently she is the co-founder & president of A la Mobile, Inc. Of the numerous awards she received over half were from women's organizations whom she served along her road to success.

~~~Born in Mexico City, Maria de Lourdes Sobrino (1952 - ) always was a determined, aspiring businesswoman. Her first venture, a flower shop, did not succeed. The travel business she started began to prosper but collapsed when the Mexican economy collapsed. After she arrived in the U.S. in 1982, she tried importing crafts and operating a sandwich shop, but no luck. No luck that is until she produced gelatina in little individual cups, a common treat in Mexico sold mostly by street vendors, but not found in stores in L.A.

Her first batch of 300 cups sold out in an afternoon. Unbeknownst to Maria, introducing her individual size dessert created the first ever ready-to-eat gelatin category in the U.S. eleven years before Kraft, Del Monte, and others brought out their individual size versions. A single mom of two daughters during twenty-seven years in business, she was the sole owner of Lulu's Desserts.

Lulu's Desserts grew to a multimillion dollar business and is one of the fastest growing Hispanic owned businesses in the U.S. Maria is involved in several women-supporting outreach programs for young women wanting to go About Her Business.

Sources: <http://www.madamcjwalker.com/bios/madam-c-j-walker/>;  
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