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**“I TRY TO LIVE SOMEWHAT IN KEEPING  
WITH MY REPUTATION AS A WEALTHY  
WOMAN”**

*A'Lelia Walker and the Madam C. J. Walker Manufacturing  
Company*

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*This article examines the marketing strategies of A'Lelia Walker, daughter and coworker of Madam C. J. Walker who manufactured beauty and hair products and built up the extremely successful Madam C. J. Walker Manufacturing Company in the early decades of the twentieth century. Whereas the mother was and still is widely admired as a hardworking “race woman,” her daughter is frequently dismissed as a spoiled and frivolous heiress whose conspicuous consumption ultimately undermined the Walker brand. By placing A'Lelia's work for the company within the context of recent scholarship on black labor and consumption, this article suggests that we understand A'Lelia's consumer strategies as a savvy response to the new demands of mass marketing. Furthermore, an analysis of the changing and gendered ideas of consumption in early-twentieth-century America reveals that A'Lelia's lifestyle challenged both black and white elites' gendered expectations of respectable consumption and helped to reshape the politics of black women's labor.*

She recalled the poor mother of A'Lelia Walker in old clothes,  
who had labored to bring the gift of beauty to Negro woman-  
hood, and had taught them the care of their skin and their hair,  
and had built up a great business and a great fortune to the  
pride and glory of the Negro race—and then had given it all  
to her daughter A'Lelia.

Langston Hughes,  
recalling Mary McLeod Bethune's funeral oration  
for Madam C. J. Walker<sup>1</sup>

She died as she had lived  
With no wearying pain  
Binding her to life  
Like a hateful chain.

Langston Hughes,  
poem on the death of A'Lelia Walker<sup>2</sup>



When Madam C. J. Walker died on 25 May 1919, black leaders from across the United States paid tribute to her work. Clubwoman Mary McLeod Bethune mourned her loss, but took comfort from the fact that “her work still lives and shall live as an inspiration to not only her race but to the world.”<sup>3</sup> James Weldon Johnson of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Robert R. Moton of Tuskegee Institute, and black leaders from across the political spectrum attended her funeral to commemorate the life and work of a great race woman. Even Walker’s final act testified to her determination that through work the race could be uplifted. Confined to her bed, she was unable to attend the Anti-Lynching Crusaders’ assembly in New York City, but insisted on sending them a check for \$1,000, pledging a further \$5,000 so that her hard-earned money might help those working to stop the lynching of black men and women.<sup>4</sup>

The death scene of her daughter A’Lelia Walker could not have contrasted more sharply. A’Lelia died just twelve years after her mother, following a night spent overindulging on lobster, chocolate cake, and champagne at a party in New Jersey. Compared to the solemn mourning that had accompanied her mother’s death, A’Lelia’s funeral seemed more like a party. Langston Hughes remarked, “just as for her parties, a great many more invitations had been issued than the small but exclusive Seventh Avenue funeral parlor could provide for.”<sup>5</sup> Presided over by the Reverend A. Clayton Powell Sr., A’Lelia’s funeral was accompanied by the nightclub quartet the Bon Bons, who sang Noel Coward’s “I’ll See You Again,” while the black pilot Colonel Hubert Julian flew over Harlem dropping flowers donated by the *New York Amsterdam News* to mark the occasion.<sup>6</sup>

These contrasting scenes are illustrative of the way in which historical memory has constructed the lives of a pair who are a frequently mentioned but infrequently debated presence in black women’s history: Madam Walker, the “inventor” of the Walker hair-growing treatment and founder of beauty schools, who provided thousands of jobs for black women in the first two decades of the twentieth century and became one of the wealthiest black women in America; and A’Lelia, the “joy-goddess” of Harlem, whose gaiety symbolized the carefree spirit of 1920s America, but whose frivolous lifestyle apparently led her to fritter away the lucrative business empire her mother had painstakingly built.<sup>7</sup> These portraits obscure not only the role that both women played in shaping the Walker Company but also the complexity of their laboring lives. Both mother and daughter worked hard most of their lives to achieve the economic independence and social status they relished later on, but they presented their labor in different ways. A’Lelia was not the consummate spoiled heiress depicted

by later historical accounts; she was over twenty when the Madam C. J. Walker Manufacturing Company was launched and played a crucial role in constructing its image and in its early success.<sup>8</sup>

The lives and careers of the Walker women suggest that while this dichotomous framework—hardworking producer versus frivolous consumer—remains useful for understanding the prescriptive context in which black women worked, we also need to explore the role women like the Walkers played in alternately constructing and exploiting, and working beyond and between these frameworks. Rather than juxtaposing the hard-working, race-proud mother with her hedonistic, pleasure-seeking daughter, this article explores the multiple meanings of work to which the opening epigraphs draw our attention: Madam Walker, who “labored to bring the gift of beauty to Negro womanhood,” “taught them the care of their skin and their hair,” and “built up a great business”; and A’Lelia, who aimed to unshackle black women’s work from that “hateful chain” that was the legacy of slavery. By analyzing these two women’s attitudes to and performances of work, we are not only offered an insight into how they were able to move between different types and meanings of work, but we are also better able to understand how women shaped the changing discourse on black women and work in the early twentieth century.

## I

To understand the Walkers’ careers we must connect, as they did, the reality of black women’s limited employment opportunities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with debates on production, consumption, and respectability. Between 1865 and 1890 black women overwhelmingly found paid employment in the same roles that they had performed during slavery. The 1890 census showed that 38.7 percent of wage-earning black women were employed in agriculture, 30.8 percent in household domestic service, and 15.6 percent in laundry work, with only 2.8 percent in manufacturing.<sup>9</sup> Although white southerners attempted to reconstruct the racial hierarchies of slavery by confining African Americans to low-paying service jobs, in the early days of freedom black women fought to redefine their work roles according to the needs of their own families. Central to black women’s understanding of work as free people was the ability to shape both their paid employment and how they spent their time outside of it in other labors. In the cotton fields, they resisted white-supervised work where possible, choosing to work half-shifts or cultivating crops for the household economy. Domestic workers similarly rejected their status as servants at the beck and call of the mistress of the family by

insisting that their work be divided up into specific tasks and by refusing to live in. With their own homes and families to look after, domestic workers preferred day-work, because it would limit white supervision as well as the risk of sexual assault by the men of the house.<sup>10</sup> For many African Americans, working for whites had long made up only one part of their laboring lives. Studies of African Americans' attitudes toward work after emancipation suggest that African American women understood work as something performed in the service of family and community in addition to the paid jobs they performed for whites.<sup>11</sup> To this end, they invested labor and resources in the household economy and in building a black-controlled community from which they might draw strength and forge work identities outside those imposed on them by whites.<sup>12</sup>

Aspirations to work independently of white supervision and to forge new work identities continued to shape black women's relationship to work in the early twentieth century, as the opportunity for migration north and to cities opened new avenues for the achievement of these goals.<sup>13</sup> The growth of the new consumer culture also affected black attitudes to work, as all Americans were compelled to reexamine the nature of the relationship between production and consumption. For example, labor organizers no longer emphasized the distinction between useful producers and wasteful consumers. Questioning the reliance on producerism which had shaped nineteenth-century labor movements, in the early twentieth century labor organizers began to embrace the "promise of consumption" in their demands for a "living wage."<sup>14</sup>

The discourse on consumption, however, was not color blind. As Lawrence Glickman has demonstrated, the white labor movement's construction of workers as powerful consumers in the early twentieth century relied upon the racial exclusion of African American, Chinese, and other ethnic groups, who were viewed as incapable of respectable consumption.<sup>15</sup> But as black Americans left the land and moved to towns and cities, black leaders increasingly recognized the importance of African Americans' individual and collective consumption. W. E. B. Du Bois, for example, grasped early on that black Americans would ultimately undermine white supremacy as consumers rather than as producers. Public displays of black consumption could challenge racial ideologies that constructed African Americans as different and racially inferior; white Americans encountering a well-dressed black consumer were shocked by what Bobby Wilson has called the "loss of difference."<sup>16</sup> However, historians of resistance have also shown how black workers sometimes exerted their identities as consumers not only in response to whites' racialized fears of black bodies in public spaces but also in ways that refused black elites' conflation of respectable consump-

tion and race progress.<sup>17</sup> Certainly the question of black workers' capacity for respectable consumption was uppermost in the minds of both anxious black elites and white liberal reformers in the new urban centers in early-twentieth-century America. When working African Americans participated in public leisure pursuits and adorned themselves with new clothes and jewelry, black elites often saw flashy and ostentatious extravagance which could be better invested in race institutions. Yet in appropriating these two crucial arenas for the performance of class and racial privilege, black workers not only drew on abolitionist traditions which constructed consumption as a political act, but also created new opportunities to construct their own identities as consumers, free from both black and white elites' control.<sup>18</sup>

The struggle to define the relationship between production and consumption was, as Davarian Baldwin and Martin Summers have shown, of central importance to the construction of a New Negro identity.<sup>19</sup> It would occupy intellectuals during the Harlem Renaissance, including Alain Locke and James Weldon Johnson, who were keen to identify black Americans not as passive consumers but as creative producers of American art.<sup>20</sup> Such organizations as the Prince Hall Masons and the Garvey movement defended in gendered terms their producer values from the challenge posed by the new entrepreneurs, professionals, and skilled workers who increasingly identified with the consumer values of postwar America.<sup>21</sup>

Just as producer values were usually articulated in gendered terms, consumption was similarly figured as a masculine prerogative. One sign of this bias was the simplistic and prescriptive characterization of black women's relationship with consumerism, not only by whites but often within black communities. Black women, particularly new female migrants to northern cities, were frequently constructed by black and white social welfare reformers as either consumers or producers, as either "the flapper who dressed flamboyantly and transgressed her elders' norms" or the "hardworking domestic who labored tirelessly to support extended family." As Victoria Wolcott has pointed out, these two contrasting images did not reflect the reality of African American women's lives, since black women "both transgressed and combined these identities as they labored to support themselves in a hostile economic climate."<sup>22</sup> Black women were policed more carefully (by clubwomen and social welfare reformers) than were men, even though women were much more likely to labor in and earn money from the new commercial leisure industries than to spend wages on them. All black female migrants were seen as potential victims of commercialized vice, in part because racial segregation in cities ensured black migrants frequently lived in close proximity to red-light districts. As such, the consumption habits and labor pursuits of black female migrants

to cities were seen as a threat to the establishment of a respectable urban black middle class and to the black male's incorporation as an American citizen.<sup>23</sup> Historians have challenged this picture of the passive black female victim that emerges from the social reform literature of the early twentieth century. Through the study of blues women and their engagement in the sexual politics of black urban spaces, Hazel Carby and others have explored the ways in which blues women and other "leisure women" inspired black women to search for autonomy.<sup>24</sup>

It is in this context that A'Levia Walker's performance of consumption should be understood. A generation removed from slavery and aware of black women's historically complicated relationship with work, she was, as Langston Hughes admiringly suggested in his poem, less shackled than her mother's generation by that "hateful chain" of slavery. Rejecting black and white elites' gendered expectations of respectable consumption, A'Levia viewed both consumption and production as legitimate forms of labor. In doing so she challenged the producer-consumer dichotomy in gendered as well as racial terms. Her refusal to conform to gendered notions of respectable consumption not only posed a threat to gender hierarchies within black communities, but also challenged the white masculine producer values upon which they had been built. Early-twentieth-century debates about the relationship between the growth of consumer power and black identity not only offer insight into the class, race, and gender anxieties that shaped them; they also help to explain why historical memory has cast A'Levia and Madam Walker as polar opposites and help us understand the differing emphases in the marketing strategies of A'Levia and her mother. Using this framework, this article explores the different ways in which the Walkers challenged gendered notions of respectability which had served to safeguard race men's exclusive leadership of business entrepreneurship and the politics of consumption. Able to link consumption with black women's respectable employment as producers, Madam and A'Levia Walker helped to reshape the politics of black women's labor.

## II

Both Madam Walker and her daughter understood that black women's labor could be constituted in numerous ways. They drew upon black women's aspirations to work free from white control, encouraging them to reject the work roles assigned by whites through the alternative of well-paid, race-proud jobs. But whereas Madam Walker more often relied on the language of production, physical labor, and respectability to underline the intrinsic value of hard work, A'Levia confidently embraced the language

of consumption. This difference in emphasis was reflected in their manner of self-presentation and marketing strategies. A'Lelia's promotional work for the company relied on the projection of her glamorous lifestyle, which emphasized conspicuous consumption rather than the daily grind, riches rather than rags—where she and the race were heading, rather than where they had come from. By contrast, Madam Walker's early marketing strategies had focused on her extraordinary transition from hard physical labor for white employers, to self-employment as a washerwoman, and finally success as an entrepreneur, independent producer, and eventually race-conscious consumer. These contrasting marketing strategies reflect the generational differences between Madam Walker and her daughter and their different responses to debates about labor, respectability, and consumption. But analysis of their marketing strategies over time suggests that Madam Walker learned from and came to share A'Lelia's sophisticated understanding of consumption.

In the early 1900s, Madam Walker drew upon black aspirations to work free from white control in order to promote her product and her idea of work. Yet she also recognized the importance of representing her vision of work within preexisting frameworks constructed by black leaders to negotiate with white southerners after the end of Reconstruction. Walker understood the role that hard manual labor had played as the foundation upon which African Americans in the South might build. Indeed, she exploited this model in order to market her product. In the frequent retelling of her rise to fame and fortune, Walker appropriated the language of the American rags-to-riches story—dignity of physical labor, self-belief, and the ability to overcome innumerable obstacles—that Booker T. Washington had used so successfully to communicate with whites in his autobiography *Up from Slavery*. For example, the Walker Manufacturing Company's advertisements stressed the fact that hard work was central to its founder's success: "Madam Walker is a hard worker in every sense of the term, and in the early stages of her remarkable business, thought nothing of working eighteen hours at a stretch, in order to make her business a success."<sup>25</sup> Walker's advertisements often relied on the retelling of her hard-work narrative. According to the account of her life included in the advertisements and articles she placed in black newspapers, the rags-to-riches story began on a former slave plantation in Delta, Louisiana where Walker started life as Sarah Breedlove in 1867. Married at fourteen to Moses Jeff McWilliams, by the time she was twenty Walker was a widow and a single mother. To support herself and her young daughter Lelia, Walker moved to St. Louis and worked as a washerwoman for white families while also attending night schools. Desperate to escape from the long hours of poorly paid, hard

physical labor, Walker invented a hair potion, which she claimed had been revealed to her in a dream.<sup>26</sup>

In fact, Walker's invention had come about through her experiences of working hard for whites as well as for another black hairdresser and entrepreneur, Annie Pope-Turnbo. It was while Walker was working as a sales agent for Pope-Turnbo that she began to develop her own formula for healthy hair. Walker claimed that her products alleviated such scalp conditions as psoriasis, as well as other symptoms of poor diet and hygiene that prevented black women from growing healthy hair. The essential elements of the Madam Walker system included a shampoo, a pomade (the hair grower and secret formula), and the use of a specially designed heated hair comb.<sup>27</sup> Like Pope-Turnbo, Walker disassociated herself from white manufacturers of hair straighteners by labeling her products as hair growers designed to restore black hair to a healthy condition. The details surrounding Walker's discovery of the secret formula may never be known. Kathy Peiss suggests that rather than inventing a new product, both Pope-Turnbo and Walker experimented with widely available hair-care products and adapted them and the heated hair comb for a black market.<sup>28</sup>

How far the beauty products of Walker, Pope-Turnbo, and other black manufacturers differed from white-manufactured hair straighteners in terms of their chemical makeup is less important than the fact that black women could choose between a white-manufactured product that encouraged them to emulate whiteness, and a product promoted by black female entrepreneurs which appealed to race pride. Whether race loyalty made women purchase one beauty product over another remains an under-researched question, but as Peiss has pointed out, we know that like their white counterparts, black women were buying a whole range of beauty products in ever greater numbers; many of them had nothing to do with lighter skin or straighter hair.<sup>29</sup> What is more germane to this article than the hair-straightening debate is how Walker was able to succeed in an ever more competitive industry and her determination to persuade consumers that hers was a race-proud product.

Walker's ability to combine several of her laboring lives—work as a washerwoman for whites, as a sales agent for Pope-Turnbo, and independently for herself—accounts for some of her early success. Indeed, Walker's own work experiences were central to how she marketed and developed her product. As a former washerwoman, she understood that black mobility and leisure time were limited, so one of the ways she taught her hair treatment methods was through a correspondence course. In 1908, Walker and her daughter founded Lelia College, where the Walker system hair and beauty methods were taught. Women could graduate through a \$25



correspondence course which allowed prospective agents to train as beauty experts while continuing their day jobs, just as Walker had done.

Meanwhile, Walker's own mobility remained central to her ability to grow the business. In 1910, she relocated to Indianapolis, Indiana where she built her permanent headquarters and set up a laboratory and a beauty school. Unable to persuade local businessmen to invest, she named herself as sole owner of all the stock when she incorporated her company in 1911. With a new factory and headquarters established, Walker set out to expand her business further by recruiting new agents to buy, sell, and use her products. Her recruitment trips took her all around the United States and, from November 1913 onward, across the Americas as she toured Jamaica, Haiti, Cuba, Panama, and Costa Rica.<sup>30</sup> Local newspaper publicity drives announced her arrival and informed black women that they could learn the Walker method through the Lelia Colleges in Pittsburgh, Harlem, and later through other colleges opened in Chicago or via the correspondence course. When she arrived in a new town or city, Walker would seek out the local black church or Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), where she would present a slide show called "The Negro Woman in Business." This would be followed by a demonstration of hairdressing techniques to a few local women.<sup>31</sup> By 1916 Walker's annual sales had reached the \$100,000 mark and the *New York Age* reported that her company had as many as 10,000 agents.<sup>32</sup>

Walker's hard-work narrative was popular among black women because it showed understanding of their current working lives and future aspirations. Her vision was not aimed primarily at white philanthropists nor at a white employment market, but rather at black women who currently worked in low-paying domestic service jobs and whose aspirations to avoid white supervision could be fulfilled through becoming self-employed Walker agents. By contrast, the vision of some of Walker's contemporaries, black educators and entrepreneurs like Booker T. Washington and Nannie Burroughs, rested upon constructing a black work identity suitable for white consumption. Indeed, both of the latter figures have been criticized by contemporaries and historians for training blacks to serve whites.<sup>33</sup> Walker, however, offered a work identity that built upon aspects of Washington's belief in the intrinsic value of hard work and Burroughs's advocacy of respectability, but which also connected both with women's aspiration for greater autonomy in their working lives. Self-employment as a Walker agent not only offered black women the potential to increase their income and consumer status by working hard for themselves, but it also enabled them to forge a work identity outside that of servant. Instead of earning from \$4 to \$8 a month as domestic workers, Walker agents might earn

between \$3 and \$5 dollars per day; very successful agents might earn up to \$100 a week.<sup>34</sup> Just as important, by offering her agents autonomy over how and where they worked, Walker emancipated them from daily contact with white expectations of black respectability, as well as from the constant sexual threat posed by working in a white home.

Walker's marketing strategy relied heavily on a demonstration of her and her company's commitment to race progress. Walker promoted the idea that she and her agents were concerned with the uplift of the entire race—not only by offering dignified work to black women, but also by using company profits for the work of racial uplift. At a time when segregation meant black self-worth was constantly under attack, Walker took advantage of her black-only client base, connecting the work of the beauty culturalist and sales agent with that of building black beauty, black pride, and black communities. Her company literature noted that she had provided pleasant and profitable work for members of her race at every stage of her business. An early press release described how: "Every flat and apartment house, erected here in Indianapolis or elsewhere, by Madam Walker, was done by a colored contractor. Her attorney, physician, and business manager are all members of the race."<sup>35</sup> The company also released press statements to black newspapers and journals, helpfully cataloging her various charitable acts and emphasizing how these showed her to be "thoroughly a Race woman . . . her every thought seems to be as to how best she can advance her Race."<sup>36</sup>

Walker was aware, however, that investing company profits in racial uplift was not the same as demonstrating that the manufacture and selling of black hair products was either race proud or respectable. As she knew only too well, the black cosmetics industry had not traditionally been regarded as an arena for the promotion of race pride. Indeed, the manufacture of black beauty products was viewed with suspicion by many race men and women for a number of reasons. During slavery, white Americans had accorded black hair great significance as a marker of racial difference. The fact that the industry was dominated by white pharmaceutical companies which promised to get rid of "short, matted, un-attractive curly hair" and create a "peach-like complexion" seemed to signify a continuation of this racial marking.<sup>37</sup> In addition, some race men and women were also resistant to the growth of the black beauty industry because it challenged their own right to define the boundaries of taste and fashion, what Davarian Baldwin has termed "the cult of the natural." Baldwin has argued that the artificial distinctions between a "natural" state of beauty—reflective of natural virtue and therefore displayed by respectable middle-class women—and the artificial adornments adopted by lower-class newcomers to the city were

part of a "style war" fought over distinctions of gender and class: "Leaders were less concerned about the racial treason of adornment than with the belief that only those of a certain class or cultivation had the right to determine such luxury."<sup>38</sup>

Walker mediated these debates by deliberately adopting the rhetoric of nature over artifice. She always promoted her product not as an artificial means of straightening hair, but as a spur to natural hair growth and a means of enhancing black women's natural beauty. At the same time, her clever presentation insisted that black women from all walks of life should take pride in their beauty. In this way, she challenged the white manufacturers who purported to sell white beauty in a bottle, as well as the black elites who assumed the prerogative of defining who and what constituted respectable displays of black beauty.

Walker's pitch was successful not only because she worked hard to invest her product and the women who sold it with race pride through her inspiring rags-to-riches story and her work for black communities, but also due to her extraordinary talent for winning over important political and business leaders. Walker developed a powerful oratorical style that has made her speeches legendary; the most famous speech was her intervention at the 1912 convention of Booker T. Washington's National Negro Business League (NNBL). Denied a platform by Washington, who shared many of the reservations held by black elites about black beauty culture, Walker insisted on being heard and offered a passionate manifesto for women's place in the business world:

Surely you are not going to shut the door in my face. I feel that I am in a business that is a credit to the womanhood of our race. . . . I went into a business that is despised, that is criticized and talked about by everybody—the business of growing hair. . . . 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. I have built my own factory on my own ground, 38 by 209 feet. I employ in that factory seven people, including a book keeper, a stenographer, a cook and a house girl. . . . I own my own automobile and runabout. . . . I am not ashamed of my humble beginning. Don't think because you have to go down in the wash-tub that you are any less a lady!<sup>39</sup>

Here Walker not only emphasizes her respectability as a producer ("I employ, I promote[d]") but also connects it to her identity as a hard-working consumer ("I own my own automobile"). Walker's purchase of an automobile was not simply a symbol of wealth but a defiant response to Jim Crow

transportation, suggestive of African Americans' potential for equality as consumers.<sup>40</sup> Her speech to the NNBL reveals her early understanding of consumption as well as production as a marker of race progress. Later on, Walker would learn to make consumption part of the work of promoting her own business.

If Walker relied on her oratorical skills and personal appeal at annual meetings of race and women's organizations to persuade black leaders of her respectability, she was equally prepared to use her growing economic power to back it up. Walker patronized a wide range of race causes. She contributed financially to the schools, institutions, and publications of Booker T. Washington, Marcus Garvey, W. E. B. Du Bois, A. Philip Randolph, and Mary McLeod Bethune, as well as to women's organizations including the National Association of Colored Women and the Young Women's Christian Association. Maintaining friendships across political boundaries, Walker was also able to play an important role in developing new political organizations after 1915.<sup>41</sup> She had labored hard to achieve her much-sought-after position of influence in the business world; this success in raising her own status as a businesswoman also enhanced the status of the black beauty professional.

### III

Increasingly aware of the power of consumption, Madam Walker was also mindful of its potential divisiveness for black communities. She presented the cultivation of black women's hair as not so much a luxurious leisure pursuit but a necessary and essential part of women's laboring lives: a prerequisite for a decent job, and for those who became Walker agents, an excellent employment opportunity. A'Lelia, however, went much further to emancipate consumption, challenging both black and white elites' guardianship of acceptable consumption. Unlike her mother, she did not perform the hard-working producer, but celebrated consumption and made it a central component of her marketing strategy. Born in 1885, A'Lelia grew up at a time when African Americans were adjusting to the institutionalization of Jim Crow customs and laws. Unlike her mother, she had received some formal education at a women's college as well as informal business training through her involvement in the Walker Manufacturing Company. Her career in her mother's company sheltered A'Lelia from working for or with whites, but this did not mean she was unaccustomed to hard work. It was A'Lelia who held the fort at the Pittsburgh office, allowing her mother to tour the country recruiting more agents. It was also A'Lelia who spotted opportunities for expansion to new lucrative markets in California and the

Northeast. As the *Inter-State Tattler* pointed out: "She spent a lot of money on a lot of things her mother thought foolish, but had it not been for A'Levia the Indianapolis concern might not have become the gold mine it was reputed to be in 1915. It was A'Levia with her college education, her ideas of system, and her ideas of business promotion and business technique that brought it about."<sup>42</sup>

Both women worked hard for most of their lives to build up their company, but as the *Inter-State Tattler* suggests, they responded in different ways to the challenges presented by changing ideas about work. While Madam Walker promoted the black women's hair and beauty industry as a respectable opportunity for economic independence, A'Levia promoted it as glamorous and culturally independent of white images of beauty. This difference is reflected in the well-known portraits of the two women: Madam Walker dressed in conventional middle-class costume, while A'Levia frequently posed in silver-studded turbans, high boots, and bright reds.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, while her mother changed her name by adopting the prefix "Madam" (at a time when black women were frequently called by their first names or simply addressed as "Aunty"), A'Levia emphasized her first name by adding an exotic "A'" to her birth name in 1922. A'Levia's glamorous image reflected her understanding that an effective marketing strategy would have to change focus as the twentieth century progressed. In fact, it was A'Levia's marketing strategy that helped the Walker Company find its place in the new consumer culture, where self-fulfillment and status might be found in leisure and public consumption rather than in hard, productive work.

By the late 1910s, A'Levia had brought her mother around to the idea that they could push the boundaries of respectable consumption. One notable example of this was A'Levia's refurbishment of her 136th Street Harlem beauty salon. Madam Walker was wary of committing substantial resources to the project, unconvinced that such an ostentatious display would attract favorable publicity for the company. Indeed, the correspondence between A'Levia, Madam Walker, and their business manager and lawyer F. B. Ransom suggests that their relationship became strained as the bills poured in.<sup>44</sup> Walker might have been prepared to invest in respectable consumption, but she remained anxious about how decadent displays of wealth might affect the Walker brand. Nevertheless, Madam Walker was quickly won over when she saw the salon for herself, as her effervescent report to Ransom reveals:

you will agree with Levia when she said that it would be a monument for us both. It is just impossible for me to describe it to you. The Hair Parlor beats anything I have seen anywhere even in the

best Hair Parlors of the whites. The decorators said that of all the work they had done here in that line there is nothing to equal it not even on Fifth Avenue, so you know it must be wonderful. It was a surprise and I haven't a word to say against it. . . . Lelia's business is bringing her close to two thousand a month and the business has picked up wonderfully since she opened up.<sup>45</sup>

Madam Walker was beginning to understand that when it came to promoting her business in an increasingly consumer-driven culture, advertising the rewards of hard work might prove more efficacious than praising its virtues. Inspired by A'Lelia's triumph, Madam Walker embarked upon a project of her own.

For some time, Walker had dreamed of following her daughter to the East Coast and building her own New York home. Envisaging a luxurious weekend retreat-cum-conference center, Walker looked to establish an East Coast headquarters which could serve as a venue for the conferences of the clubwomen's movement and the African Methodist Episcopal Church, since this "would be a big ad for me."<sup>46</sup> Walker hired the black architect Vertnor Tandy, and between them they created a home which was, according to one newspaper account, "so splendid and so perfectly appointed that it would serve not alone as a source of pride to her and others of her race, but compel the respect and admiration of scoffing whites."<sup>47</sup> Villa Lewaro was situated in Irvington-on-Hudson, the upstate retreat of wealthy New Yorkers, whose residents included Rockefellers, Astors, and Vanderbilts. Villa Lewaro contained thirty rooms—including ten bathrooms, ten bedrooms, a library, and a music room—and furniture made to order.<sup>48</sup> Madam Walker's new creation owed much to A'Lelia's influence, suggesting as it did that the mother was moving toward her daughter's strategy of confidently displaying their consumption power. Indeed, A'Lelia despaired that she had taught her mother too well, confiding in their business manager Ransom: "You know mother is a very reckless spender, far more so than I am. She 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."<sup>49</sup>

Aware that others might view Villa Lewaro as a reckless display of wealth, Madam Walker was careful in her presentation of the new mansion to the press: "Villa Lewaro was not merely her home, but a Negro institution that only Negro money had bought."<sup>50</sup> It was a "monument to the race," albeit one that could make money.<sup>51</sup> Walker's presentation of her new mansion as an act of communal rather than personal consumption was also reflected in her determination to place her new mansion at the center of her race work. In the summer of 1918, the Walkers held a "race confer-

ence" to mark the official opening of Villa Lewaro and to discuss African Americans' involvement in World War I.<sup>52</sup> Madam Walker continued to use her new mansion as a venue from which she might encourage race solidarity and assert her race leadership. In January 1919, she hosted the International League of Peoples of the Darker Races, the pan-African organization which she founded with her new political allies, Marcus Garvey, A. Philip Randolph, and the Reverend Adam Clayton Powell Sr.<sup>53</sup> Having designed Villa Lewaro, at least in part, as a venue for race conferences, it was not surprising that she planned for the house to continue this function, specifying in her will that Villa Lewaro be handed over to the NAACP after A'Lelia's death.<sup>54</sup> However, in the twelve years that followed her mother's death in 1919, A'Lelia would use their upstate home as a venue for social and cultural gatherings. As a supporter of the new cultural movement known as the Harlem Renaissance, A'Lelia hosted her own events, inviting artists, writers, and socialites rather than politicians to assemble at Villa Lewaro. In the 1920s, A'Lelia would style herself as a consumer of art and a setter of trends.

#### IV

To a large degree it was the daughter who taught the mother the power of consumption as a marketing strategy, yet the two women deployed their consumer power to different ends. Whereas in the second decade of the twentieth century Madam Walker invested in race work in order to enter black political circles, A'Lelia created and used her celebrity status to gain access to the New Negroes, the black cultural leaders of 1920s Harlem. In addition to her famous weekend parties at Villa Lewaro, designed to showcase new and unknown artists, she later opened up her 136th Street townhouse to host "The Dark Tower."<sup>55</sup> Launched in October 1927, the Dark Tower provided a space for writers and artists to come together, share ideas, and meet important figures in the publishing world. A'Lelia's ambition was to situate the Dark Tower at the heart of Harlem's artistic life. Named after Countee Cullen's poem, which was written on the wall opposite Langston Hughes's *Weary Blues*, the Dark Tower was just a step away from the 135th Street Library and the 137th street YWCA. Unlike the expensive NAACP benefits and awards dinners for the literary contests of the *Crisis* and the *Opportunity*, the Dark Tower was to be a venue for young artists to meet away from the disapproving eyes of the "art as propaganda" establishment led by W. E. B. Du Bois. As A'Lelia explained in a letter to Ransom: "I let it be known that it is opened for the new Negro writers and the younger group such as Countee Cullen and a number of others in the same field."<sup>56</sup>

For a year or so, the Dark Tower provided a formal salon for the writers and artists of Harlem. As a salon, it was unable to make enough money to support itself and satisfy the profit-minded Ransom. It was officially closed in October 1928.<sup>57</sup> Nevertheless, A'Levia presented her investment in the Dark Tower as evidence of her power both as a consumer and a producer/facilitator of art, as her letter to members expressing regret on the closure of the Tower reveals: "Having no talent or gift, but a love and keen appreciation for art, the Dark Tower was my contribution."<sup>58</sup> In this letter A'Levia represents herself as a consumer, a connoisseur, and a producer of black art. The Dark Tower was to be a space for New Negro artists, yet she charged artists/customers for entry and drinks, since she envisaged the Tower as a branch of the Walker business. Her venture suggested the magnificence of her consumption power; she was able to fund a salon, an institution which was typically doomed to fail in financial terms. At the same time, she was attempting to make money from this venture through charging membership fees.

A'Levia's awareness that she was challenging the producer/consumer dichotomy in gendered and racial terms is perhaps indicated by the aggressive masculinist stance she was prepared to take to defend her enterprise. Harold Jackman recalled one such occasion in a letter to his friend Countee Cullen. In Jackman's account, one customer objected to paying fifty cents to enter the Tower. A'Levia is reported to have struck her customer, who responded by challenging her to a fight. Describing the incident as "a riot," Jackman's account, whether true or not, reveals the ways in which A'Levia transgressed gender norms—or was believed to have transgressed, since this story was widely repeated. That A'Levia flouted gender conventions is illustrated not only by the fact that she was prepared to use physical force to defend her new salon, but that her challenger was prepared to lay chivalry to one side and challenge her to a fight.<sup>59</sup> When not fighting with her customers, A'Levia played the role of the generous patron, salon hostess, and consumer of art, who was determined to live up to her reputation as a woman who consumed well.<sup>60</sup>

The different ends to which the Walker women directed their consumer power might lead us to conclude that Madam Walker's interest and stake in black political circles made her more conservative in her use of consumption and more prepared to respect the views of black elites, whereas A'Levia's entry into the decadent world of New Negro artists made the adoption of a consumer identity more attractive. But A'Levia, too, was careful to maintain both profiles: producer/race worker as well as consumer/supporter of the arts. Although she developed new ventures in the 1920s, she maintained the company's support for race organizations such as the



NAACP and Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) so that they might continue their support of the Walker Company. She also became a member of the Women's Auxiliary to the NAACP which was formed in May 1924 for the purpose of fundraising through staging such events as benefit concerts.<sup>61</sup> A'Leia Walker was fond of opening up her beauty salon to host these meetings, thereby enhancing her reputation as a stylish yet race-conscious patron.<sup>62</sup>

A'Leia had clearly learned from her mother how to construct a public image for herself and the company by connecting them both with race work. But whereas Madam Walker had relied on press releases and advertising campaigns to emphasize her contributions to the women of the race and sell her product, A'Leia's marketing strategies in the 1920s reflected changing ideas about work, consumption, and the consequent need to deal with the challenges of mass marketing. As Kathy Peiss has demonstrated, women entrepreneurs like Walker who pioneered the franchise in the beauty industry in the first two decades of the twentieth century were able to develop with very little capital due to the fact that sales agents paid up front for the products they were responsible for reselling. The introduction of mass marketing in the 1920s, however, threatened the successful operation of female-owned and -run beauty companies whose operations were based upon maintaining little capital; they could never compete with the \$60,000 per month advertising fees that Pond's paid to women's magazines in 1926 or the \$20,775 spent on advertising by Elizabeth Arden.<sup>63</sup> Although black-owned beauty companies were excluded from many national magazines, they did have to compete with white enterprises like the Plough Chemical Company, as well as with a growing number of black businessmen whose investments in the black beauty industry provided the capital to develop mass marketing.<sup>64</sup>

A'Leia Walker recognized that the Walker Company's advertising and marketing strategies would have to adapt if they were to compete in an ever more competitive and advertising-dominated industry. Although she continued her mother's commitment to leading black newspapers like the *Negro World* and journals like the *Messenger*, using subscriptions and advertising fees to ensure favorable coverage, she relied heavily on her exotic celebrity lifestyle to generate publicity. Whereas her mother had issued press releases which carefully managed the image she wished to create, A'Leia constructed a lifestyle and generated stories that both black and white newspapers were willing to cover. Maintaining this image, as she explained to Ransom—ever eager to limit the expenses of both Walker women—required considerable effort: "I try to live somewhat in keeping with my reputation as a wealthy woman."<sup>65</sup>

It was this reputation and the publicity it attracted that caused A'Lelia to view even family social occasions as marketing opportunities. For example, she managed her adopted daughter's wedding in ways which would bring favorable publicity to the company. With her long hair and dark skin, Fairy Mae Bryant became an asset to the Walkers, who had invited her to join the family back in Indianapolis in 1912 and renamed her Mae Walker Robinson.<sup>66</sup> Eleven years later, A'Lelia, who had herself married with some regularity, decided it was time that Mae began her marital career, explaining to Ransom that "I look upon this wedding as the very biggest advertisement we have ever had [except for] Villa Lewaro."<sup>67</sup> On 24 November 1923, Mae was married to a Dr. Gordon Jackson from Chicago, who was thirteen years older. A'Lelia was delighted with the wide press coverage afforded the spectacle of the Harlem season, reporting after the show to Ransom: "Yes I noticed the article in the *Crisis* this month. It is very good. Well the wedding served for one purpose if no other; it let the people know we are still on the map."<sup>68</sup> It is clear that A'Lelia viewed her celebrity lifestyle as hard work. She certainly recognized the effort that her mother had invested in maintaining her own celebrity status and was concerned about the impact that this effort had on her health when she pleaded with Ransom to help her mother rest: "People will give parties and affairs for her and she will be just as tired as if she is working."<sup>69</sup>

Besides using her celebrity to attract publicity, A'Lelia also employed innovative marketing techniques that combined the consumer culture of the 1920s with her contacts with race organizations. One of the company's marketing strategies for which A'Lelia's celebrity was crucial was the "Trip Around the World" campaign. A'Lelia's own trip to Europe, Africa, and the Holy Land was widely covered both at home and by the international press. The campaign rested on the dream that A'Lelia's foreign travel could become reality for black Americans. The advertising strategy began by inviting leading race men and women to enter a contest in which they would receive votes from supporters who sent in tokens collected from various Walker shampoos, hair growers, and other beauty preparations.<sup>70</sup> Those candidates who received the highest number of tokens or votes would win an all-expenses-paid trip around the world, taking in thirty-five cities in fifteen countries. A'Lelia is quoted in the advertisements as desiring "more of our Race to visit foreign countries, to see the world, and to know personally of its people." The runner-up prizes reflected her mother's passion for education; they included educational scholarships of \$500 and \$250.<sup>71</sup> Because contestants took out advertisements to encourage their supporters to buy tokens, the Walker company received a good deal of free publicity as a result. For example, Percival A. Burrows, an assistant general secretary

to the UNIA, represented himself as the official candidate of the UNIA, including in his advertisement a letter of endorsement from Marcus Garvey. Burrows's advertisement describes how "Almost Every Negro Organization is represented in this contest, and I am sure that it is your desire that we should win."<sup>72</sup> In this way, consumption of Walker products became quite literally a political act. Other candidates in their advertisements explained to their followers why they should purchase Walker products, praising the Walker women's track record of philanthropic donations, employment opportunities for race women and men, and endowment of NAACP scholarships.<sup>73</sup>

The ease with which the Walker Company was able to link consumption of its products with a vote on black organizations and leaders suggests the extent to which African Americans understood consumption as a political act. That it involved the consumption of glamorous foreign travel was due in part to A'Lelia's confident assertion of her consumption power. The advertising campaign also suggested, however, A'Lelia's recognition that the Walker Company was struggling to compete with the advertising budgets demanded by the new age of mass marketing. A'Lelia's reliance on candidates to take out advertisements which would advertise her company and its products was a clever attempt to find a way around this problem. Although later accounts have focused on A'Lelia's "reputation for spending rather than making money," she was savvy in her ability to connect the one to the other.<sup>74</sup>

## V

In the summer of 1928, the Madam C. J. Walker Manufacturing Company opened a spectacular new \$350,000 factory and headquarters in Indianapolis. A year later the stock market crashed; thousands of banks and businesses closed, and millions of Americans lost their jobs. By 1930, the Walker Company's revenues of \$200,000 were at their lowest point since 1916. Factory workers at the new Midwest plant were laid off and Villa Lewaro was sold in 1932.<sup>75</sup> As the company fell into crisis, A'Lelia increasingly distanced herself from its operation, causing employees and critics alike to question whether her mother might have been able to prevent the decline. Ransom was careful to put aside such speculation in the company's 1930 Christmas message to employees: "[Y]ou no doubt are thinking if the founder Madam C. J. Walker had lived things would have been different. . . . If so you are wrong. No one could have foreseen the financial crisis that has gripped not only America but the world."<sup>76</sup>

The Madam C. J. Walker Manufacturing Company survived the Depression—it continued to be owned by the Walker estate until sold



in the 1980s. But A'Lelia did not. She died of a cerebral hemorrhage in August 1931 at the age of forty-six. Fascination with this pair did not end with their demise. In 1998, Madam Walker became the twenty-first African American to be included in the U.S. Postal Service's Black Heritage Series of commemorative stamps, while A'Lelia's rumored bisexuality has been the subject of a recent novelistic account.<sup>77</sup> But the Walkers were important not only as exceptional women, but also as an example of how black women contested and reshaped their work roles and struggled to assert their own understandings of the many meanings of work. Madam Walker constructed a definition of black women's work as respectable, independent, race proud, and connected to political power, but she also learned from A'Lelia, who promoted black women's work identities as consumers. Where Madam Walker emancipated the work of production from associations with slavery and white control of labor, A'Lelia emancipated consumption from "respectable" white expectations as well as black expectations of consumer restraint. The careers and marketing strategies of the Walker women suggest that understanding African American work in the early twentieth century requires us to recognize the many ways in which black women not only adjusted to but were able to shape the changing politics of their labor.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Langston Hughes, *The Big Sea* (1940; repr., New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1986), 246.

<sup>2</sup>*Walker News*, September 1931.

<sup>3</sup>Quoted in A'Lelia Bundles, *On Her Own Ground: The Life and Times of Madam C. J. Walker* (New York: Scribner, 2001), 277.

<sup>4</sup>Mr. Storey's Secretary to Mrs. C. J. Walker, 10 May 1919, Part 7: The Anti-Lynching Campaign, 1912-1955, Series B, NAACP Papers, Library of Congress (LOC), Washington DC, microfilm, reel 1.

<sup>5</sup>Hughes, *The Big Sea*, 246.

<sup>6</sup>*Walker News*, September 1931; Hughes, *The Big Sea*, 246.

<sup>7</sup>Contemporaries contributing to this view include Carl Van Vechten, particularly in his depiction of A'Lelia in his novel, *Nigger Heaven* (New York: Knopf, 1926), but also in his letters, "Keep-Inchin' Along": *Selected Writings by Carl Van Vechten about Black Art and Letters*, ed. Bruce Kellner (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979), 154. For later accounts that have contributed to this view, see David Levering Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 236; Bundles, *On Her Own Ground*; and Ben Neihart's novel, *Rough Amusements: The True Story of A'Lelia Walker, Patroness of the Harlem Renaissance's Down-Low Culture* (New York:



Bloomsbury, 2003). Both A'Lelia and Madam Walker make brief appearances in many historical accounts of black women in the twentieth century, but their relationship to the politics of work is seldom analyzed. See, for example, Deborah Gray White, *Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894–1994* (New York: Norton, 1999), 125; and Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work and the Family, from Slavery to the Present* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 181.

<sup>8</sup>*Inter-State Tattler*, 10 September 1931, quoted in Carole Marks and Diana Edkins, eds., *The Power of Pride: Stylemakers and Rulebreakers in the Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1999), 66.

<sup>9</sup>Angela Davis, *Women, Race and Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), 88.

<sup>10</sup>For a good account of black women and work after emancipation, see Leslie A. Schwalm, *A Hard Fight for We: Women's Transition from Slavery to Freedom in South Carolina* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997).

<sup>11</sup>See, for example, Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow*; and 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 S. Dye (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1991), 42–55.

<sup>12</sup>Sharon Ann Holt, "Making Freedom Pay: Freedpeople Working for Themselves, North Carolina, 1865–1900," *Journal of Southern History* 60, no. 2 (1994): 236.

<sup>13</sup>Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow*, chap. 5.

<sup>14</sup>Lawrence Glickman, *A Living Wage: American Workers and the Making of Consumer Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 110.

<sup>15</sup>See *Ibid.*, esp. chap. 3.

<sup>16</sup>Bobby Wilson, "Race in Commodity Exchange and Consumption: Separate but Equal," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 95, no. 3 (2005): 595.

<sup>17</sup>Excellent discussions of consumption, race, and resistance include Victoria Wolcott, *Remaking Respectability: African American Women in Interwar Detroit* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), esp. chap. 1; Tera Hunter, *To Joy My Freedom* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997); and Nan Enstad, "Fashioning Political Identities: Cultural Studies and the Historical Construction of Political Subjects," *American Quarterly* 50, no. 4 (1998): 754–82. Also see Robin D. G. Kelley, "'We Are Not What We Seem': Rethinking Black Working-Class Opposition in the Jim Crow South," *Journal of American History* 80, no. 1 (1993): 75–112; and Ted Ownby, *American Dreams in Mississippi: Consumers, Poverty, and Culture, 1830–1998* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

<sup>18</sup>For a discussion on the origins of consumer activism in the abolitionist movement, see Lawrence Glickman, "'Buy for the Sake of the Slave': Abolitionism and the Origins of American Consumer Activism," *American Quarterly* 56, no. 4 (2004): 889–912.



<sup>19</sup>See Davarian Baldwin, *Chicago's New Negroes: Modernity, the Great Migration, and Black Urban Life* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), esp. chap. 3; and Martin Summers, *Manliness and Its Discontents: The Black Middle Class and the Transformation of Masculinity, 1900–1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

<sup>20</sup>Summers, *Manliness and Its Discontents*, 205–7.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>22</sup>Wolcott, *Remaking Respectability*, 93.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, 94. Also see Hazel Carby, "Policing the Black Woman's Body in an Urban Context," *Critical Inquiry* 18, no. 4 (1992): 741.

<sup>24</sup>Wolcott, *Remaking Respectability*, 94; Carby, "Policing the Black Woman's Body," 754–55. See also Angela Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999).

<sup>25</sup>Early press release on Madam Walker, n.d., box 12, Madam Walker Collection, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis, IN, hereafter MWC.

<sup>26</sup>This was the account published in the numerous newspaper stories placed by the Walker Company. See, for example, Floyd G. Snelson, "Slave Cabin in a Queen's Palace: Mme C. J. Walker Company Pioneer in Negro Business," box 12, MWC. See also George Schuyler, "Madam C. J. Walker," *The Messenger*, August 1924.

<sup>27</sup>According to Kathy Peiss, women entrepreneurs took the language of industry and applied it to their beauty schools and products. For female beauticians, a system meant "a signature skin and hair treatment program around which entrepreneurs opened cosmetology schools and ran correspondence courses." See Peiss, "'Vital Industry,' and Women's Ventures: Conceptualizing Gender in Twentieth Century Business History," *Business History Review* 72, no. 2 (1998): 232.

<sup>28</sup>Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture* (New York: Henry Holt, 1998), 70. For more information on Annie Pope-Turnbo, see Bettye Collier-Thomas, "Annie Turnbo Malone," in *Notable Black American Women*, ed. Jessie Carney Smith (Detroit: Gale Research, 1992), 724–27. See also the *Claude A. Barnett Papers* (Frederick, MD: University Publications of America, 1980).

<sup>29</sup>Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 225.

<sup>30</sup>"Madam Walker Sails for Cuba," *Chicago Defender*, 29 November 1913.

<sup>31</sup>See Charles Latham, "Historical Sketch," collection guide, MWC.

<sup>32</sup>"Over 10,000 in her employ," *New York Age*, n.d. [1916], cited in *Bundles, On Her Own Ground*, 179.

<sup>33</sup>See Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880–1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University



Press, 1993), 185–230; and Donald Spivey, *Schooling for the New Slavery: Black Industrial Education, 1868–1915* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1978).

<sup>34</sup>Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 91.

<sup>35</sup>Early press release on Madam Walker, n.d., box 12, MWC.

<sup>36</sup>Fragment of press release: Madame Walker and charity, ca. 1918, box 2, MWC.

<sup>37</sup>For further discussion of the racial significance whites attributed to hair, see Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 61–62. For more on racial ideologies as expressed in early beauty advertisements, see Noliwe M. Rooks, *Hair-Raising: Beauty, Culture, and African American Women* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 32–35.

<sup>38</sup>Baldwin, *Chicago's New Negroes*, 60–61.

<sup>39</sup>Report of the Thirteenth Annual Convention of the National Negro Business League, 21–23 August 1912, Records of the National Negro Business League (Bethesda, MD: Universal Publications of America, c. 1995), microfilm, reel 2.

<sup>40</sup>Wilson, "Race in Commodity Exchange," 595.

<sup>41</sup>W. E. B. Du Bois, "A Great Woman," *The Crisis*, July 1919; Schuyler, "Madam C J Walker," *The Messenger*, August 1924. For Walker's ability to maintain friendships across the political spectrum and her political leadership, see Kate Dossett, *Bridging Race Divides* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008), chap. 3.

<sup>42</sup>*Inter-State Tattler*, 10 September 1931, cited in Marks and Edkins, *The Power of Pride*, 66.

<sup>43</sup>For images, see *The Messenger*, October 1926, and Marks and Edkins, *The Power of Pride*, 67.

<sup>44</sup>Madam Walker to Ransom, 9 September 1915, box 1, MWC.

<sup>45</sup>Madam Walker to Ransom, 22 February 1916, box 1, MWC.

<sup>46</sup>Madam Walker to Ransom, 9 September 1915, box 1, MWC.

<sup>47</sup>*Afro American* (Baltimore), 6 December 1930.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup>A'Lelia Walker to Ransom, 18 May 1918, box 4, MWC.

<sup>50</sup>*New York World*, 2 December 1923, cited in Bundles, *On Her Own Ground*, 235.

<sup>51</sup>*Afro American* (Baltimore), 6 December 1930.

<sup>52</sup>Dossett, *Bridging Race Divides*, 141–42.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 122–25.

<sup>54</sup>Codicil to the Last Will and Testament of Sarah Walker and the Court's Construction Thereof, item 3, p. 2, box 3, MWC.

<sup>55</sup>For more on A'Levia's Villa Lewaro parties, see Jessie Fauset to Langston Hughes, Tues. 23 n.d., Langston Hughes Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT. Also see Hughes, *The Big Sea*, 244–46; and Bundles, *On Her Own Ground*, 283.

<sup>56</sup>A'Levia Walker to Ransom, 18 October 1927, box 4, MWC.

<sup>57</sup>Harold Jackman to Countee Cullen, 12 December 1929, Countee Cullen Papers, Manuscript Division, LOC, Washington DC, hereafter CCP.

<sup>58</sup>Cited in Marks and Edkins, *The Power of Pride*, 75.

<sup>59</sup>Jackman to Cullen, 12 December 1929, box 3, CCP.

<sup>60</sup>A'Levia Walker to Ransom, 28 February 1915, box 4, MWC.

<sup>61</sup>Miss Randolph to Mrs McClendon, 15 June 1925, container 416, Series C, NAACP Papers, LOC.

<sup>62</sup>Bessie Olive Miller, President of the Women's Auxiliary, to Members, 20 January 1925, container 416, Series C, NAACP Papers, LOC.

<sup>63</sup>Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 105–6.

<sup>64</sup>For an account of the challenge posed by mass marketing, see Ibid., 97–133.

<sup>65</sup>A'Levia Walker to Ransom, 28 February 1915, box 4, MWC.

<sup>66</sup>Bundles, *On Her Own Ground*, 139–42.

<sup>67</sup>A'Levia Walker to Ransom, 13 November 1923, MWC, as quoted in Ibid., 284.

<sup>68</sup>A'Levia Walker to Ransom, 5 January 1924, box 4, MWC. Also, see *The Crisis*, January 1924.

<sup>69</sup>A'Levia Walker to Ransom, 4 May 1917, box 4, MWC.

<sup>70</sup>Publicity file, box 12, MWC.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid.

<sup>73</sup>"Some of the Reasons Why You Should Buy Madam C J Walker Preparations," publicity file, box 12, MWC.

<sup>74</sup>Marks and Edkins, *The Power of Pride*, 66.





<sup>75</sup>The NAACP could not afford the upkeep; see Bundles, *On Her Own Ground*, 293.

<sup>76</sup>Ransom to "Co-workers," Western Union Holiday Greeting, 22 December 1930, as quoted in Bundles, *On Her Own Ground*, 289.

<sup>77</sup>See Neihart, *Rough Amusements*.

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