

lady boss

A Netflix show and new visitor experiences in Indianapolis offer a fresh look at a trailblazing 20th-century entrepreneur.



Octavia Spencer plays Madam C.J. Walker (left) in the Netflix miniseries *Self Made*, released in March.

THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE daily pass by Indianapolis' Madam Walker Legacy Center without thinking about the name scrawled across the iconic Indy building. The Art Deco landmark built in 1927 pays tribute to Madam C.J. Walker, one of America's greatest entrepreneurs and social activists. A new Netflix miniseries, *Self Made: Inspired by the Life of Madam C.J. Walker*, tells her full story, based on a biography by Walker's great-great-granddaughter A'Lelia Bundles.

In *Self Made*, Academy Award-winning actress Octavia Spencer portrays this daughter of freed slaves and her struggle against racism, sexism and poverty. In spite of it all, Walker launched a multimillion dollar beauty-products empire in Indianapolis. She chose her location in 1910 after recognizing Indy's lively black business community.

America's first self-made female millionaire was born in 1867 on a Louisiana plantation, with the given name Sarah Breedlove. By the late 1800s, she was a single mom, dreaming of a better life. She had a wealth of manual labor experience, but slim chance of getting ahead, given her lack of education, money and connections. So she leaned into work ethic, charisma and her talent for self-promotion.

Her golden idea behind Madam C.J. Walker Manufacturing Company stemmed from a universal problem for black women: hair loss. No one cared about it in the early 1900s, until she filled the void with her products, branded under her new married name.

In Walker's words: "I got my start by giving myself a start." It's a message that still resonates with dreamers, entrepreneurs and social activists of every generation.

where to find madam walker

Catch a show or exhibit on a trip to Indy—or toast her legacy with a namesake drink.

Visit **MADAM WALKER LEGACY CENTER**, where a face-lift is underway at the 1927 complex that housed Walker's factory and national headquarters. A theater inside has staged famous performers of color for almost a century.

Visit **INDIANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY'S** *You Are There 1915* exhibit to learn how Walker brought financial independence to thousands of women and leveraged her wealth to promote social justice.

Take a close look at the giant Walker portrait in the lobby of **THE ALEXANDER** hotel. Sculptor Sonya Clark crafted it from 3,840 combs. At the hotel bar, order an On My Own Ground, a citrusy cocktail inspired by Walker's story.

At **LOUVINO**, a small-plate eatery on Massachusetts Avenue, a signature wine flight bears Walker's name. The trio of whites includes an Oregon blend, plus a French Gewürztraminer and Côtes du Rhône Blanc.

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