

Town of Greenburgh
**ASSISTANT
TOWN HISTORIANS**



— felicia barber + riley wentzler —

In honor of Black History Month, we, the Assistant Town Historians, wanted to do a piece highlighting the contributions of African Americans.

The Power of Wealth and Humility: A Reflection on Two Highly Influential African Americans

By: Riley Wentzler & Felicia Barber

Power has been defined in many ways. At times power is used as a synonym for capability or ability to act. At other times it's defined as being in control of one's own destiny. In its harshest and most Machiavellian definition, power can be described as the ability to get others to do what you want them to do. However one defines power, one cannot deny that wealth and humility can both help a person achieve it. Especially if one belongs to an often marginalized group such as African Americans.

Below are two stories one of wealth and one of humility that show how two highly influential African Americans gained both personal and political power.



Wealth- Madame C.J Walker

Madam C.J. Walker, the first African American millionairess, was born on December 23, 1867 on a cotton plantation close to Delta, Louisiana. Her parents were Minerva and Owen Breedlove, two recently freed slaves. Although she is known as Madame C.J. Walker, her first name is actually Sarah. The name Madame C.J Walker comes from her marriage to her second husband Charles Walker. Her mother died in 1874 and her father died the next year. When her father died, seven year old Sarah was sent to live with her older sister and brother-in-law. They moved to Vicksburg Mississippi in 1877. However, Sarah's life there was not a happy one because her brother-in-law, Jesse Powell, was highly abusive.

Therefore in 1882, at the age of fourteen, she married Moses McWilliams and moved in with him. In 1887, Moses died and she moved to St. Louis, Missouri. There she attended public school at night while she worked as a washerwoman during the day, earning \$1.50 a day. It was in school that she met her second husband Charles J. Walker. It was also while in school in 1890, that she developed

a rare scalp condition that caused her to lose a lot of her hair. She used a variety of home remedies and store bought cosmetics to try to treat the disease but nothing worked. So she began developing her own hair care products which worked. This inspired her to develop a whole line of cosmetic and medicinal hair care supplies and this was how she made her millions.

In 1905, she and her husband traveled around the country promoting her products. Three years later, her new found business was going so well that she used some of the profits to start a beauty school in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. They decided to move the company to Indianapolis, Indiana. At this point the Madame C. J. Walker Company was already making several million dollars so, they used some of the profits to finance the construction of a YMCA in the city of Indianapolis. Madame C.J. Walker's life is proof of the saying, "Necessity is the mother of invention."

In 1913, she and Charles divorced, so after spending some time abroad in Latin America, she moved to Harlem in order to use her wealth to help improve the lives of other African Americans. She founded several charities to do this. In 1918, she moved to Greenburgh's village of Irvington on the Hudson and commissioned a famous architect to build a large estate which she called Villa Lewaro. Today her estate is on the National Register of Historic Places. It was here at her home, that on May 25, 1919, at age 51 Madame C.J Walker passed away (<https://www.biography.com/people/madam-cj-walker-9522174>). While as Madame C.J Walker's story shows wealth is one pathway to power, it is not the only such pathway. Another pathway to power is through humility.



Humility-Martin Luther King Jr.

Martin Luther King Jr. was a great speaker, great humanitarian, and is widely acknowledged as the most influential civil rights leader in American History. Yet few people today, can say that they actually saw and heard him directly. One who can is Professor Sheldon Malev, a professor of psychology at Westchester Community College. Now 80 the professor still vividly recalls when, at age 28, he heard Martin Luther King Jr. speak.

It was October 25, 1967, and at that time I was unaware of the historical significance or the lifetime effect that Dr. King's speech would have on me. Furthermore, none of us in attendance that day could possibly know that this prominent speaker would be assassinated in less than 6 months (April 4,

1968), at the age of 38. Nor did any of us know that his birthday would eventually become a national holiday to commemorate his achievements. On that day I was a young, full-time instructor of psychology at Fairleigh Dickinson, 10 years younger than the speaker. I knew very little about him, and I had come to the meeting to hear what he had to say, knowing only that he had been campaigning for civil-rights for African-Americans, and had often been in the news. (Malev, 2019, p.1).

At that time, Prof. Malev was very active in protests against the Vietnam War, so what resonated with him most was how Martin Luther King Jr. compared then President Lyndon Johnson's handling of the Vietnam War to President Kennedy's handling of the Bay of Pigs Invasion. King compared the two because he considered both the Bay of Pigs Invasion and the Vietnam War to be terrible mistakes. Kennedy admitted that the invasion was a mistake and apologized for it, whereas, in contrast, Johnson did neither. This comparison awed the young Prof. Malev, who was impressed with King's skill as a speaker, his intelligence, his compassion and his integrity. He then listened as King stressed that humility was a key virtue for good leaders to have, and how admitting ones mistakes is an essential part of being humble.

King then used the Kennedy-Johnson comparison to lay out three basic principles as to how all people, but especially good humble leaders, should deal with their mistakes. King said that following in Kennedy's and NOT Johnson's example people should:

1. **Realize and recognize their mistakes.**
2. **Admit their mistakes.**
3. **Try to correct their mistakes** (Malev, 2019, p 2).

In conclusion, power can be defined in many ways. But however one defines power it is certain that both wealth and humility are means to achieving it, especially if one belongs to an often marginalized group such as African Americans. The story of C.J Walker displays power through wealth and the story of Martin Luther King Jr. shows power through humility.

Martin Luther King Jr.'s humility is what enabled him to spread his message of diversity and inclusion of people of all races, religious creeds, and economic backgrounds, which is truly wealth for the mind and soul. It is this kind of wealth which brings forth the best in us all.



Previous Slices of History include:

A Beautiful View for the Perfect Event: The Belvedere Estate (2/9/19)

<http://www.greenburghny.com/Documents/Mail%20-%20jlucasey@greenburghny.com3.pdf>

An Unspoken Promise of Redemption: How Hartsdale Got its Name (1/31/19)

<http://www.greenburghny.com/Documents/Greenburgh%20is%20one%20of%20the%20few%20communities%20anywhere%20that%20provides%20residents%20with%20frequent%20history%20bytes%20about%20their%20community.pdf>

Lost History: The Tragedy of Malkasten(1/26/19)

<http://www.greenburghny.com/Documents/Mail%20-%20jlucasey@greenburghny.com2.pdf>

The Intersection of Banking, Ballet, and School: Greenburgh's Warburg Estate (1/18/19)

<http://www.greenburghny.com/Documents/Memo%20Style2.pdf>

A Small House, an Important Meeting, a Huge Victory: The Story of the Odell House (1/12/2019)

<http://www.greenburghny.com/Documents/Mail%20-%20jlucasey@greenburghny.com1.pdf>

The Guardians of History: Greenburgh's Historical Societies (1/6/19)

<http://www.greenburghny.com/Documents/Mail%20-%20jlucasey@greenburghny.com.pdf>

How a Flat Tire led to a Happy Escape: The Story of Carvel in Greenburgh (12/11/18) <http://www.greenburghny.com/Documents/Carvel%20History.pdf>

A Thousand Words Which You Never Knew: The Forgotten Story of the Seal of Greenburgh. (11/17/18)
<http://www.greenburghny.com/Documents/Slice%20of%20History%20-%20A%20Thousand%20Words.pdf>

"The Disappearing Railroad Blues" in Greenburgh: The Fate of the Putnam Railroad Line and the old Putnam Trail ((11/6/18)
<http://www.greenburghny.com/Documents/Slice%20of%20History%20-%20%20Railroad%20Blues.pdf>

A Different Kind of Rebel: Greenburgh's Contributions to the Underground Railroad (10/27/18)
<http://www.greenburghny.com/Documents/GREENBURGH.pdf>

Greenburgh at The Great American Crossroads: Greenburgh's Civil War Story (10/19/18) <http://www.greenburghny.com/Cit-e-Access/news/index.cfm?NID=47461&TID=10&jump2=0>

Greenburgh's Hall of Heroes: Ferncliff Cemetery Where Memories Live Forever (10/12/18) <http://www.greenburghny.com/Cit-e-Access/news/index.cfm?NID=47403&TID=10&jump2=0>

A Final Resting Place for "Man's Best Friend": The Peaceable Kingdom (9/29/18) <http://www.greenburghny.com/Cit-e-Access/news/index.cfm?NID=47331&TID=10&jump2=0>

Greenburgh and The Arts (9/22/18) <http://www.greenburghny.com/Cit-e-Access/news/index.cfm?NID=47278&TID=10&jump2=0>

**Greenburgh's BROTHERLY LOVE, RELIEF AND TRUTH: A History of
The Freemasons in Greenburgh (9/12/18) <http://www.greenburghny.com/Cite-Access/news/archnews.cfm?NID=47212&TID=10&jump2=0>**

About the Authors:

We are both Assistant Town Historians at Greenburgh Town Hall and we are engaged to be married and are currently looking for permanent employment.

Riley Wentzler:

I was born and raised in a small rural town in central Pennsylvania. In high school, I took every honors course available including four years of Spanish. I received A's in all of them. I graduated third in my class of 146 students. This brought me to Edinboro University of Pennsylvania. Once there, I continued my trend of academic excellence. I graduated summa cum laude in Political Science with a minor in Spanish and a Master's in Communication Studies, with a G.P.A of 3.94. It was also there that I met my lovely fiancée, Felicia Barber. My Master's in Communication has promoted public speaking, teamwork, and customer service. My Political Science degree has developed my research skills using computer-based tools and provided me with experience using the Microsoft Office products. My minor in Spanish has facilitated my bilingual capabilities. During my internship at Greenburgh, I created the petition for the State Roads project using website tools. My diverse education and areas of interest have provided me with a wide range of skills. I look forward to finding a career opportunity in business or government. **To suggest a topic for next week's article, you can contact me at assistanthistorian@greenburghny.com, or to help me find employment, you can contact me at rjwentzler413@gmail.com**

Felicia Barber:

I was born in New York City and raised in Hartsdale, New York. I graduated from Ardsley High School. I recently earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in Graphic Design at Edinboro University of Pennsylvania. It was here that I met my fiancé, Riley Wentzler. As a result of my academic excellence, I won a scholarship every year. I learned and applied many graphic design skills to projects during my summer internships and at school. I am proficient in using Adobe graphic design applications including Photoshop, Illustrator and InDesign. For my Identity/branding course at Edinboro, I created logos to appear on the tee-shirts of Physical Education majors. For a veteran's upcoming event, I used a typeface to focus the reader to the soldier in the poster. For the State Roads Legislative Campaign project, I created the embedded graphic-photo that accompanied the petition I am looking for a job to utilize my skills as a Graphic Designer in an agency, print shop, company or government **To suggest a topic for next week's article, you can contact me at assistanthistorian@greenburghny.com. To learn more about my artwork or to help me find employment you can contact me at feliciadbarber@gmail.com.**

Two Interviews with the authors

<https://riverjournalonline.com/around-town/a-love-of-history-and-each-other/13708/>

<https://wcbs880.radio.com/articles/news/stories-main-street-couple-cerebral-palsy-brings-manytalents-town-greenburgh>

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Biography.com Editors . (2019, January 25). *Madame C.J. Biography* . Retrieved from Biography.com : <https://www.biography.com/people/madam-cj-walker-9522174>

Malev,S 2019 "MEETING WITH MARTIN LUTHER KING, Jr."