



*My Black Woman Story:
Madam C. J Walker*

By Kayla Morgan



Introduction

Women overtime have been undermined and placed on the backburner throughout history and the current times of our society. In this slide show I'll speak about Elizabeth Keckley. Before Going into my black woman story about a influential women named Elizabeth Keckley, I'd like to note some of the two of the most influential women in my personal life. My mother and my grandmother.



Social Importance

To begin this discussion about influential black women, I would like to begin by speaking on the social importance of the black woman. I've provided some photos of some well known African queens with proves the social status of Black women in pre colonial times. The women to the right are known as Queen Amina of Zaria, Queen Nefertiti, and Kandake, Empress of Ethiopia.



Elizabeth Keckley

Elizabeth Hobbs Keckley (1818-1907) was an American seamstress born into slavery by slavemaster Colonel Armistel Burwell and mother Agnes. She is best known for her place in the white house as the personal seamstress for the first lady Mary Lincoln, wife to 16th president Abraham Lincoln at the time. She is among one of the most influential black women due to her treacherous feat.



MADAM ELIZABETH KECKLEY
Modiste to Mrs. A. Lincoln

Early Life

Elizabeth Keckley was born unfortunately as a result of a rape between her mother Agnes and her father who was a slave owner named Armistel Burwell. Although Keckley was half white, she received no special treatment or respect from her white heritage. She was treated harshly and cruelly as any other African American Slave. (Elizabeth Keckley, Age 14 on right.)



Hardships of Slavery

As a result of the absence of morals and respect that slavemasters had towards slaves and the offspring of slaves, Keckley was forced to look after the newborn child of her enslaver at the age of four. Due to Keckley's age and inexperience with children, she rocked the newborn baby too hard in the cradle to the point where the baby fell out. It wasn't uncommon for Slaves to be punished for the lightest of mistakes, so this mistake by Keckley meant she was in for an intense punishment.



Forced Into Motherhood

Elizabeth was sent away at 14 years old to live with her father's eldest son, her half brother, in North Carolina. Since her brother was aware of their familial relationship, he and his wife were very cruel to Elizabeth. After a while, she was sent to live and work for a white neighbor who had been raping her for four years. As a result of the abuse, she became pregnant and birthed one son, George.

(Elizabeth and senator Jefferson Davis pictured on right.)



Escaping Slavery

Elizabeth's mother, Agnes, was a seamstress for the Burwell family for a long time and passed her artisanal skills down to her daughter Elizabeth. Her mother wondered if Elizabeth could make a profit off of this, so eventually Elizabeth began making dresses for wealthy women. Overtime, Elizabeth became excellent at her craft and became known as one of the best seamstress' in the town. Once she began making some funds from dressmaking, she began making plans for her and her son to gain freedom.

(Elizabeth Keckley's dresses pictured on right)



Marriage

While planning for freedom, Elizabeth married a man named James Keckey. James lied about his freedom when he was in fact enslaved. Elizabeth inquired about the cost of her and James' freedom. According to the slaveowners, their freedom would cost around 1,200 which equates to 40,000 dollars today. It was a hard trip to make that kind of money because most of her funds were extracted from her as a slave. Eventually, she came up with the money to pay off the price of 1,200 dollars, and on November 15, 1855 her and her son were officially freed.



Life during freedom

During the course of her freedom, One of Elizabeth's clients recommended her to the at the time, First Lady Mary Lincoln, who was very impressed with her work. Elizabeth went on to become Mary's personal dressmaker and stylist. Over the next several years, she became very close and was considered a confidant of Mary. With the publicity of being the first lady's seamstress, Elizabeth's business flourished. "She was able to open her own dress shop and hired 20 assistants to help her with her work. Elizabeth also started a charity to help recently freed people start new lives."

(First Lady Mary Lincoln in one of Elizabeth Keckley's dresses pictures on right)



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