

Intersection of media and culture: on her own ground by madam c. j. walker thesis...

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Thesis statement

On Her Own Ground by Madam C. J. Walker, is not just a form of entertainment, it is an accurate record of the life and times of one of America's most inspirational figures. As an African American, Walker had to work ten times as hard to make her name in spite of the adversity she faced as a black woman, living in the late 19th Century. Overcoming tremendous odds, C. J. Walker's story is the definitive 'rags to riches' tale, much loved by the American public: born to enslaved parents, orphaned at a young age; married and widowed before the age of twenty, and died with her name attached to a small fortune: hers is the American tale of 'the land of opportunity.' The biography of C. J. Walker addresses the culture through a rousing, inspirational tale of one woman's aspiration to defy her critics.

My thesis will argue that this biographical work blurs the boundaries between 'entertainment' and 'real life' by allowing the reader to both enjoy and critically appreciate Walker's struggle towards success and its comment on our culture. It is a comment on the culture of the patriarchal, Caucasian-centric America of that time: the slave trade and the disregard of women as being anything other than mothers and wives meant that black women were considered worthless. My discussion will center on the way that a book, which is, fundamentally, an object of entertainment, can also be a resource for accessing a culture gone past and assessing our own culture, by comparison.

Introduction

Entertainment and culture are often thought of as being linked but wholly separate entities but in some cases, that simply is not true. *On Her Own Ground* is the biography of African American, female entrepreneur and philanthropist, Madam C. J. Walker; it is an entertaining read which also informs the reader of the culture and attitudes of America in the late 18th Century. Born into a world where her fate as a slave was already pre-ordained, Walker defied the odds by creating the hugely successful company, Madam C. J. Walker Manufacturing Company, who specialized in hair and beauty products specifically designed for black women. Her company alone is demonstrative of Walker's defiance toward the limitations which society placed upon her. Born to slave parents and orphaned by the age of seven, many would have written her off as either dying young or being restrained by a life in slavery. However, her indefatigable resolve and lust for life allowed her to become one of America's most distinctive and significant figures of the last two-hundred years. Her biography allows the reader to explore a culture of constraints and limitations which prevented many from even finding that they had a dream, much less achieving it. It blurs the lines between entertainment and cultural comment by examining Walker's life through the eyes of her great-great-Granddaughter, A'Leila Bundles. The purpose of this thesis is to discuss just how this work of great American literature manages to both entertain and shame modern day readers through its stirring recount of Walker's life and culture as a slave-come-entrepreneur.

References

Bundles, A'Leila. *On Her Own Ground: the life and times of Madam C. J. Walker*. Cambell, CA: Paw Prints Publishing, 2008. Print.