



# Women Make History:

## Stories we should have learned in school

"...[Only] half of the...inhabitants of our State of California enjoy the one great privilege cherished by the hearts of an enlightened people...to participate in the performance of a duty which is the true essence of that spirit for which our forefathers fought and bled – the spirit of American democracy...."

**Maria Guadalupe Evangelina de Lopez**



### **Maria Guadalupe Evangelina de Lopez**

Born in Los Angeles in 1881, [Maria Guadalupe Evangelina de Lopez](#) was a pioneering Latinx suffragist, educator, and activist for the preservation of Mexican-American heritage.

After graduating from Pasadena High School in 1897, Lopez earned a degree in education at what later became UCLA. She began her career teaching English as a second language to high school students, while also translating important historic and cultural documents. In 1902, Lopez joined the faculty at the University of California, becoming the youngest instructor on staff and possibly the first Latinx.

[Lopez](#) was active in the Votes for Women Club and became president of UCLA's Equal Suffrage League in 1911. She played a critical role in [winning the vote for California women](#) by focusing her efforts on Latinx women. She traveled throughout the state distributing suffrage materials she had translated into Spanish. A powerful orator, [Lopez delivered her speeches in Spanish](#), which was unprecedented at the time.

In her speeches, Lopez argued that California could not call itself a democracy while disenfranchising half its citizens. She also published editorials in newspapers, including The Los Angeles Herald. In October 1911, California women won the right to vote, making it the sixth state in the nation to do so. In 1913, leading suffragists selected Lopez to represent California in the [Women's March on Washington, D.C.](#)

Next, Lopez turned her attention to labor initiatives, again translating voting information and other vital documents into Spanish. In 1914, World War I interrupted everything. She joined the war effort, even moving to New York City where she studied auto mechanics and aviation. Eventually, she shipped out to France where she worked as an ambulance driver. During a prolonged attack on the hospital where she was stationed, Lopez and three other women risked their lives to transport wounded soldiers to safety. In 1918, Lopez and the other women were honored for their bravery by the French government.

After the war, Lopez returned to Southern California, married, and resumed teaching. She renewed her efforts to educate the public about California's rich cultural heritage, and to promote the importance of learning the Spanish language.

Lopez co-founded the Woman's City Club of Los Angeles and was also active in the Woman's College and Business Clubs. She also served on the Executive Board of the High School Teachers' Association. In 1937, she became the president of the UCLA Faculty Women's Club.

Lopez died in 1977 in Orange, California.



Photo: Michael Ochs Archives/Getty Images

"I am a woman who came from the cotton fields of the South. From there, I was promoted to the washtub...[then] the cook kitchen...From there, I promoted myself into the business of manufacturing hair goods...I have built my own factory on my own ground."

### Madame CJ Walker

## Madame CJ Walker

[CJ Walker](#) was born Sarah Breedlove in 1867 to parents who were emancipated slaves. She became the first African American millionaire, widely known for her fortune and her unrelenting support of Black women.

Throughout her life, Walker turned misfortunes into opportunities. Orphaned at six, married at fourteen, she became a mother at 18 and a widow at 20. When her husband died, she moved with her daughter to St. Louis to be near her family. Working long, grueling hours as a washerwoman earning less than \$1 a day, Walker put herself through school by attending classes at night.

A scalp disorder, common among Black women at the time, caused [Walker](#) to lose most of her hair. Determined to find the cause and a cure, she turned for advice to her brothers. As barbers, they were knowledgeable about hair care. The experience inspired her to take a job in 1904 selling hair products for [Anne Malone](#), an African American woman who later became one of Walker's biggest competitors.

While Walker developed skills as a door-to-door salesperson, she also began experimenting with her own formulas. She found that hair loss among Black women was partially due to poor diet and was related to products created by white owned companies lacking an understanding of African American needs. Eventually, Malone accused Walker of stealing trade secrets and fired her. Walker then launched her own hair care business. Remarried in 1906, she took her husband's name and called her business "Madam CJ Walker's."

By 1917, Walker had hired and trained more than 20,000 Black women nationwide as “beauty culturalists.” The company also established programs to teach Black women how to budget and successfully build their own businesses.

As Walker’s success grew, so did her philanthropy. Declaring that she “wanted the money not for herself, but for the good she could do with it,” Walker funded scholarships for Black women to attend African American colleges. She supported other Black-run businesses and organizations, including the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Walker bankrolled the opening of YMCA chapters in African American communities and supported African American artists. She became a sought-after speaker and a political activist who helped to organize anti-lynching protests and civil rights demonstrations.



Walker died in 1919 at the age of 51, but her legacy lives on. Her will bequeathed nearly \$100,000 to orphanages, institutions, and individuals, and also directed that two-thirds of future net profits be donated to charity. In 2006, Walker’s life was the subject of a play by Regina Taylor, the *Dreams of Sarah Breedlove*. In 2016, the cosmetics giant, Sephora, launched a partnership with Sundial Brands, to produce products in Walker’s honor. In 2020, Netflix produced a mini-series, *Self-Made* about Walker’s life.

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## Bring it Home: Conversation Starters

August 26th marks the 101st anniversary of the certification of the [19th Amendment](#). While most of us know the names of the Superstars of Suffrage, thousands of other women (and men from all walks of life were also courageous enough to stand for change—often at great personal risk and sacrifice. Many died before the Amendment was passed.

Researching the stories of women whose names I never learned in school and sharing their stories with you, is both humbling and empowering. As we celebrate the rights we’ve won and continue the battle for those we’ve yet to win, I invite you to do something in honor of these women. Volunteer. Donate. Educate. Join the fray. Take a risk.

### If you have time, but not much money...

- Forward this newsletter to a friend (or your child’s teacher) and invite them to join our movement to educate Americans about women we should have learned about in school.
- Join the movement to [get Mary Ware Dennett’s image on the U.S. quarter](#).
- Tell someone the story of one of the women featured in this newsletter.

### If you’re able to donate something toward the advancement of women...

- Donate to the **National Women’s History Museum** [here](#).
- Donate to the **National Women’s Hall of Fame** [here](#).

If you haven’t listened to my interview on [Professor Buzzkill’s Woman Crush Wednesday](#) podcast, download my episode [here](#).

Then tell me your story. Email me at: [Sharon@sharonspaulding.com](mailto:Sharon@sharonspaulding.com)

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Sharon Spaulding discovered the hidden story of Mary Ware Dennett, suffragist, sex ed, and reproductive rights activist, after she married Dennett's great-grandson. Last year, Time magazine included Dennett as one of the most important women in American history.

Sharon has spent ten years researching first-wave feminism, the battle for reproductive rights, and Mary's life in the context of politics and social mores from 1914–1947. She received a grant from Radcliffe College's Schlesinger Library to support her research and the creation of a manuscript. Her journalism has appeared in New Hampshire Magazine, BOLD, and Utah Stories. She lives near Salt Lake City with her family and two dogs.

Sharon is available to speak on the forgotten stories of remarkable women and the history of the suffrage and reproductive rights movements of the early 20th century. Contact her at: [Sharon@SharonSpaulding.com](mailto:Sharon@SharonSpaulding.com).

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Help reclaim the lives of remarkable women. Share the newsletter and invite others to subscribe. Follow me on social media. [www.SharonSpaulding.com](http://www.SharonSpaulding.com)

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