

## Harper & Malone.

“For a woman to believe that she can exercise her will in order to accomplish a ‘mission in the world’ is a symptom of disease.”

Dr. R. Frederick Marvin, Professor of Psychological Medicine

*Martha Matilda Harper, a poor white servant girl, and Annie Turnbo Malone, the daughter of slaves, each developed successful hair care franchises in the patriarchal business world of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and championed the cause of equality and beauty in a racist and sexist America.*

This historical docu-drama miniseries examines race and feminism in the burgeoning beauty industry at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

From servant girl to business magnate, Martha Matilda Harper’s rags to riches story is the ideal of the American dream, but she was not alone. Annie Malone, the daughter of slaves, had a parallel story. These women achieved the American dream through the business of female beauty in the midst of a dangerous and racially divided country.

Martha Matilda Harper’s magnificent hair and unique hair tonic, and Malone’s scientific mind and humanitarian goals, along with their inspired vision of giving both black and white women independence, beauty and power, are the qualities that helped them achieve their success. Their parallel lives span from the 1860s to the 1950s and show that hard work, inspiration, and the pursuit of a dream can change the lives of women from both races.

At age seven Harper’s father sent her away from home to work as a domestic servant. During her many years in servitude she honed her skills at hair care and developed an organic hair tonic that would revolutionised how white women washed and dressed their hair. Her business grew beyond her wildest dreams, leading her to create retail franchising as we know it today.

Annie Malone’s career took off in St. Louis, MO in the early 1900s. Malone, the 10<sup>th</sup> of eleven children, was orphaned at a young age and raised by her sister. With expertise in both chemistry and hair care for the African American, Malone developed her own hair care products and opened the first hair salon for black women. She created both a factory and a beauty school, with her most famous students being Chuck Berry and Madam CJ Walker.

Their success did not come without struggle and hardship as they dealt with inferiority in a time when white men held all the power. Harper and Malone gained strength from their faith and from the women around them who supported and believed in their dreams. They pushed against patriarchal domination to prove that women, doing it their way, had an equal and necessary place in business and government.

This historical docudrama begins in the remarkable period called the Gilded Age - a time when the business world was masculine and ruthless and women were meant to be at home, and ends in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. This period in history includes the Robber Barons, Jim Crow, the New Woman, New Thought, Suffragettes, Red Lining, the Gibson Girls, and Blues and Jazz music, as well as the invention of the Kodak camera, the bicycle and the phonograph (to name a few). By examining the lives of these two historical women, and the cultural divides they lived in, a better understanding of where we are now in terms of racial and gender equality can be gleaned from their lives. *Harper & Malone* will show us how far we have come, and how far we still have to go to achieve racial and gender equality.