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Rose Morgan

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Rose Morgan (1912-)

Beauty Salon Owner and Cosmetics entrepreneur

A leading cosmetologist and businesswoman, Rose Meta Morgan gained fame as an entrepreneur among black beauty salon operators. In the 1940's, she and her business partner, Olivia Stanford, co-owned a Harlem hair salon that was noted for being one of the largest in the nation. Rose Meta House of Beauty was the largest black-owned beauty shop in the United States and in a 1946 article, *Ebony* magazine touted it as the "Biggest Negro Beauty Parlor in the World." Stanford was an expert in scientific treatments of the body and made the business one of the leading pioneers of Swedish massage, "colonie irrigation," and other alternative health care approaches in a beauty salon environment, while Morgan was renown for her excellent skills with hair care and design. Her hairstyling talent drew loyal customers from Chicago, Detroit, Washington and other parts of the country.

Promoting the beauty of African American hair and instilling pride in black women about their appearance was one of Morgan's lifelong goals. She was dedicated to dispelling the myth, held among many African Americans, that African American hair was inherently inferior. She told an interviewer that although the races had different hair textures, she believed that nobody's hair was racially superior. She emphasized that it was vitally important to make sure that one was properly groomed and attractive, regardless of one's hair texture.

Rose Morgan was born in Shelby, Mississippi, in 1912, the daughter of sharecroppers, and was heavily influenced by her father's career as a profitable black southern farmer during the time of Jim Crow segregation. Her formative years were

heavily influenced by her father's role model and hid gift as a mentor, who instilled Morgan with many enduring business lessons which she practiced throughout her life.

After her family migrated to Chicago in 1918, Morgan revealed a talent for hairdressing at the early age of eleven. Upon graduating from high school, she attended the Morris School of Beauty. Morgan eagerly entered professional beautician practice and married briefly for one year. A job as the hairstylist for the famed black actress and singer, Ethel Waters, provided her with the opportunity to move to New York, where she teamed up with Olivia Stanford to open the Rose Meta House of Beauty in Harlem. In 1946, Rose Morgan introduced her own line of beauty aids, Rose Meta Cosmetics, one of the first black owned make-up lines.

In 1955, she had achieved enough wealth and recognition to finance a new building that housed the Rose Morgan House of Beauty, another innovation in the beauty culture business with a profitable clientele. Over the years, Rose Morgan trained over 3,000 employees to serve the needs of her stylish clientele. Always the entrepreneur, she produced fashion shows featuring her clients and employees as models, a program that is still imitated by many contemporary black hair styling salons and beauticians clubs.

On Christmas day of 1955, she married her second husband, the world famous boxing champion, Joe Louis. Over the span of his professional boxing career, Louis had not been careful with his finances and Morgan's tried unsuccessful marketing efforts such as introducing a men's signature cologne, to help her husband become more solvent. It was a case of opposite personalities attracting each other and after three years the marriage was annulled, although both parties retained mutual respect for the other former spouse. The marriage itself was short-lived, but for many years thereafter Morgan would

be referred to in the black press and elsewhere as Joe Louis's second wife, although she had solid accomplishments in her own right.

Always looking for a new marketing opportunity, Morgan wrote a column for *The New Pittsburgh Courier* during the 1960s entitled, "The Beautiful Truth: Rose Morgan's Beauty Tips," which allowed her to dispense advice to young and mature women of color. In a December 12, 1959 article, the paper carried an announcement from attorney Louis Saunders that he and Rose Morgan were engaged to be married, although no date had been set. The couple eventually wed in the early 1960s and initiated a new business venture, the New Jersey Savings and Loan Association. When the couple separated, Morgan abandoned the venture and directed her energies toward becoming one of the founders of the black-owned Freedom National Bank in New York and later became a major shareholder. Morgan's last business endeavor, Trim-Away Figure Contouring made its debut in 1972. She retired from beauty culture business in the 1970s, ending a highly successful career, but remained active in community organizations.

Morgan was undaunted by the many demands of managing a large business and found time to be active in her community. Besides serving as president of the Interracial Council for Business Opportunity, she held a vice presidential post with the National Council of Negro Women. A life member of the NAACP, she has also served on Board of Trustees for Kilamanjaro Coffee.

Like another black female entrepreneur, Madame C. J. Walker, Rose Morgan was born with formidable business skills and a drive for innovation, which she employed to build a financially successful business in the beauty culture industry. During a period of Jim Crow segregation in the United States, which legally denied blacks employment and

business opportunities, both women excelled at being visionary entrepreneurs. Now in retirement, she is justifiably proud of her role as an innovator and mentor. Morgan currently resides in New York City. Her former business partner, Oliver Stanford, went on to start another successful business, Partners for Health and Inner Wheel in St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands and died in March 2004 at the age of 89.

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