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MILLIONAIRES'

MASTER CLASS

Meet four entrepreneurs who discovered how to turn their passions into sizable profits *by Rosemarie Robotham*



EVER WONDER why some people lock down millions while others labor at dead-end jobs and never seem to have enough money? “There are many paths to wealth,” says Helen MacMillan, a success coach based in Columbia, Md., and author of *7 Simple Ways to Shift Into Your Million Dollar Zone*. “But

you have to do more than the outer work of acquiring skills, creating your product and marketing your business. You also need to do the inner work—accessing your truth and aligning with your highest goals. If you don’t, success will elude you

or be unsustainable.” Just ask the four entrepreneurs we’ve brought together for a master class on wealth building. They are among Black America’s 35,000 millionaires, and their stories are as varied as your own: Warren Brown quit his job as a government lawyer to pursue a passion for baking cakes; Venus Opal Reese turned survival skills honed as a homeless teen into a seven-figure coaching and mentoring business; Deborah Tillman parlayed her child care expertise into a starring role on a hit reality series; and Kenneth Brown made a fortune in fast food and now teaches others to do the same. These wealth creators share what they’ve learned in the trenches and tell you how to set yourself up to make millions, too.



Warren Brown

Owner, CakeLove Bakeries,
Washington, D.C. (cakelove.com)

THE FINANCIALS: CAKELOVE'S RETAIL BUSINESS GROSSED \$1.3 MILLION LAST YEAR. BROWN IS NOW TAKING THE GAME WHOLESALE WITH A PLAN TO SELL INTO 10,000 LOCATIONS OVER THE NEXT FOUR YEARS.

● **Millionaire Mindset:** "Passion is commitment without condition. It's a lot like love."

● **The Power of Passion:** After receiving graduate degrees in law and public health, Warren Brown landed a lucrative position as a federal litigator in Washington, D.C. But the son of a physician and a homemaker from Cleveland felt as if he was losing himself. Searching for meaning, he saw that cooking offered a release after long days of poring over legal briefs, and in 1999, he resolved to learn everything he could about baking. Soon he was taking food orders from co-workers and holding tastings for family and friends. Their excitement was Brown's first clue that his passion could be turned into profits. "It was time for me to step out on faith and act," he states.

Brown took a leave of absence from law, secured a \$125,000 loan backed by the Small Business Administration and in 2002, opened up his first bakery. Now with three retail stores in the Washington, D.C., region, he's taking his product wholesale with CakeLove's Cake in a Jar, selling customer favorites such as salty caramel, red velvet and triple chocolate in grocery stores, hotels and quick-serve restaurants across the country. "People kept saying, 'We want your cream cheese icing,'" remarks Brown, 42. "So I had the idea to jar it in different flavors. One day I sliced up a pound cake, put it in a jar, put some icing on it, then some caramel. When I tasted it, I was in heaven. Cake in

a Jar is the next evolution of our business, and it all came from asking how we could be even better."

Brown's Secrets to Success:

● **Conduct focus groups.** "Your responsibility to your customers doesn't end with making a sale. You've got to find out what they're thinking and feeling, what will make their lives easier. For our cake snacks in a jar, we held focus groups asking about jar shapes, flavors, serving sizes and price points. We also polled our critics, vendors and people whose business we didn't yet have. A merchant sells what the public wants, but you have to innovate, which means really listening to what people are asking for—that's your clue to the next big thing."

● **Understand the sacrifices.** "When you're in a drive to start a business you're going to be lean, but it's important to know the sacrifices won't always be financial. There's time, for example. I don't like having to ask my wife and two daughters to wait, but a business is a jealous mistress."

● **Turn failure around.** "On one social media site, we received a lot of positive reviews, and some negative ones. We reached out to the negative reviewers and asked them to talk to us about how we could serve them better. The bottom line is, we had failed those customers and needed to fix that. You're going to trip and fall sometimes, but the key is to learn from it."

Venus Opal Reese, Ph.D.

Owner and CEO, Defy Impossible, Inc., Dallas; founder, Black Women Millionaires Virtual Salon (defyimpossible.com)

THE FINANCIALS: REESE'S COMPANY HAS GROSSED \$1.2 MILLION SINCE SHE INCORPORATED HER COACHING AND MENTORING BUSINESS THREE YEARS AGO.

● **Millionaire Mindset:** "Your money-maker is located in your pain, where life broke your heart. Most of us are running away from pain, but I'm saying, 'No, baby; let's lean into it.'"

● **The Power of Reinvention:** "My mother put me out of the house when I was 16," notes Venus Opal Reese, "and I never went back because things were not right there." On the streets of Baltimore for the next two years, she navigated drugs, pimps, prostitutes and police, all while strategizing for her next meal and a place to lay her head come evening. However, she kept attending high school, counting on it for structure and two meals a day. Enter her math teacher Judy Mae Francis, who encouraged the homeless teen to write her story, then submitted the poems to an NAACP scholarship competition—which her student won. "Miss Francis opened a door to my future," Reese says now. "When I saw what she'd done for me, I had what I call my first new thought, and it was this: I see myself as worthless, but Miss Francis sees me as somebody who matters, just because I'm here."

Reese eventually earned three postgraduate degrees, including a Ph.D. in literary theory from Stanford University. Now a tenured professor at the University of Texas at Dallas, she is a sought-after motivational speaker and has a reality TV show about "seven-figure sisters" in the works. "As an entrepreneurial coach, I specialize in teaching Black women how to break their first million," she explains. "My thing is, let me show you how to monetize your work so you can live the way you want to."

Reese initially honed her coaching techniques with a group of 12 White male CEOs who'd heard her speak at a conference. "After I spoke, every one of them hired me," she recalls. "I charged them \$5,000 each. They didn't flinch, and that's how I launched my business. People pay me for my ear, my ability to hear what others are not saying."

she continues. "That's straight-up street. I've literally harnessed my survival and turned it into success. Because if you can hear what broke people's hearts and help them feel compassion for themselves, then you can show them how to take actions they never saw before. Package that as a VIP day, and you can charge \$25,000—and get it. Yet I'm not doing anything different from what Miss Francis did for me."

Reese's Secrets to Success:

● **Master the five D's.** "First, determine what you want. Second, declare your independence from whatever keeps you small. Third, develop desire, so you can be pulled by your passion instead of forcing an outcome. Fourth, design who you want to be beyond an inherited notion of yourself. And finally, defy your impossible. Now, the thing to know is that your impossible looks like life as usual—like, 'Oh, I can't really have that car or that man or that dream.' It feels like something that can't be done. And the way you defy your impossible is to create

DR. VENUS OPAL REESE: COURTESY DR. VENUS OPAL REESE; WARREN BROWN: ABRAMS PUBLISHING



BLACK MILLIONAIRES: WHO ARE THEY?

While researching his book *The Wealth Choice*, **Dennis Kimbro**, a professor of business at Clark Atlanta University, conducted a seven-year study—through questionnaires, interviews and focus groups—of 1,000 African-American millionaires. These patterns emerged:

35,000

Number of U.S. BLACK MILLIONAIRES, according to the Federal Reserve

They represent **ONE-TENTH** of **ONE PERCENT** of all African-Americans.

70% have college degrees; most majored in business.

By **AGE 30**, they were already **EARNING SIX FIGURES**.

\$2,500 Their average credit card debt

90% made their money through entrepreneurship.

The average **INCOME** of their **PARENTS** was \$10-20K a year.

15 Number of years married

\$4 Million average net worth

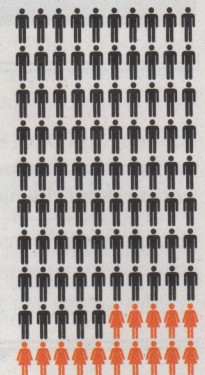
2+ Number of kids

They save **10-20%** of all earnings.

Average college GPA was 2.9 for **MEN** and 3.4 for **WOMEN**.

\$300,000 Most live in homes that cost this or less.

52 The average age of Black millionaires



85% MALE
15% FEMALE

They attend **WORSHIP** services **TWICE WEEKLY** at small local churches.

“**Declare your independence from whatever keeps you small.**”

a crisis—a goal bigger than yourself—that gets you up in the morning with a determination to solve whatever it might be.”

● **Secure your foundation.** “Before quitting your job to become an entrepreneur, grow your expertise. That means you take the skill set you’re using as an employee and figure out how to bring in money on the side as a sole proprietor. But please don’t quit your job. You need to know that you can replace your income, before you launch your company.”

● **Leverage your story.** “Being on the street taught me to watch, listen and strategize, and that’s the core of what I teach today. My clients have generated more than \$7 million in the last five years using systems I first learned when I was navigating the streets.”