BLACK HISTORY MONTH

February 2026






Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Directions: Click on each historical figure to discover their contribution to the American economy today!						1 **Lewis Latimer**
2 **George Washington Carver**	3 **Sara Breedlove**	4 **Jan Ernst Matzellger**	5 **Henry Blair**	6 **Solomon Brown**	7 **Granville T. Woods**	8 **Reginald F. Lewis**
9 **Garrett Morgan**	10 **Alfred L. Cralle**	11 **Mark Dean**	12 **James. E. West**	13 **Patricia Bath**	14 **Roy Clay, Sr.**	15 **A'Lelia Walker**
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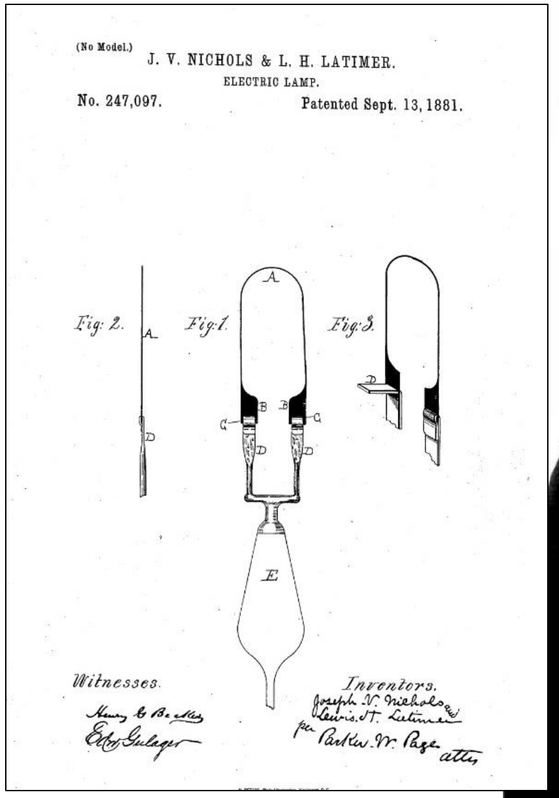
23 **Lonnie Johnson**	24 **Robert L. Johnson**	25 **Maggie Lena Walker**	26 **R.R. Wright Sr.**	27 **Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander**	28 **A. Philip Randolph**	MCEE MARYLAND COUNCIL ON ECONOMIC EDUCATION

Lewis Latimer

Lewis Latimer was born in 1848 to parents who had escaped slavery, and he grew up facing poverty and racial discrimination. As a young man, he taught himself drafting and engineering while working low-paying jobs. Despite barriers, he became a skilled inventor and engineer.

Latimer helped improve the carbon filament used in light bulbs, making electric lighting last longer and become more affordable. His work helped electricity spread into homes and businesses, which supported economic growth. He also worked with Alexander Graham Bell on early telephone designs and became one of the few African Americans in the electric industry during his lifetime.


(No Model.)

J. V. NICHOLS & L. H. LATIMER.

ELECTRIC LAMP.

No. 247,097. Patented Sept. 13, 1881.

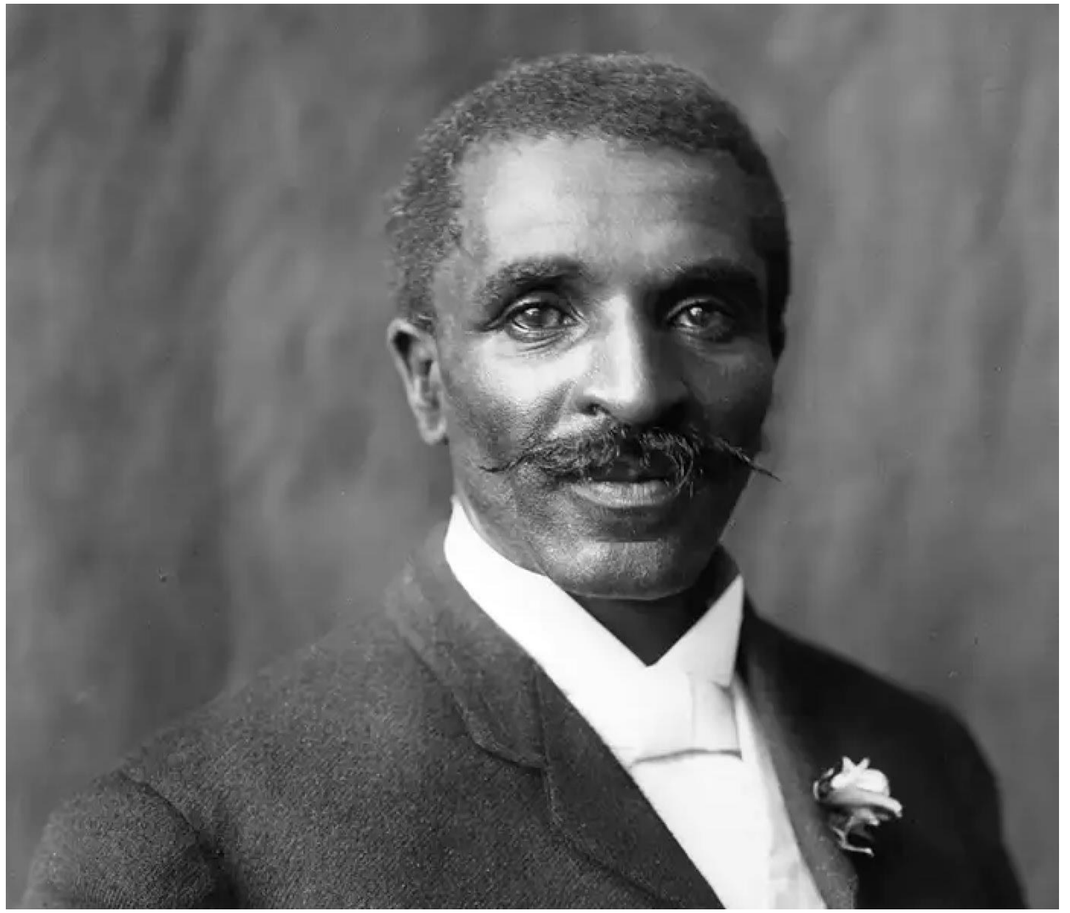
Fig: 2. Fig: 1. Fig: 3.

Witnesses.

Inventors.

George Washington Carver

George Washington Carver was born into slavery around 1864 and later became a scientist and teacher. He faced extreme poverty and racism but pursued education with determination, eventually earning degrees in agriculture. Carver spent most of his career teaching at Tuskegee Institute.



Carver taught farmers how to rotate crops like peanuts and sweet potatoes to restore soil damaged by cotton farming. His research helped poor farmers grow healthier crops and earn better incomes. Although he created hundreds of useful products, he chose not to patent most of them so farmers could benefit freely.

Sara Breedlove

Sarah Breedlove was born in 1867 to formerly enslaved parents and was orphaned at a young age. She worked as a washerwoman and struggled with poverty before developing hair-care products for Black women. She faced both racial and gender discrimination in business.

Walker built a nationwide beauty company and trained thousands of women as sales agents, giving them steady income and business skills. Her success made her one of the first self-made Black women millionaires. She also donated large sums to schools, charities, and civil rights causes.

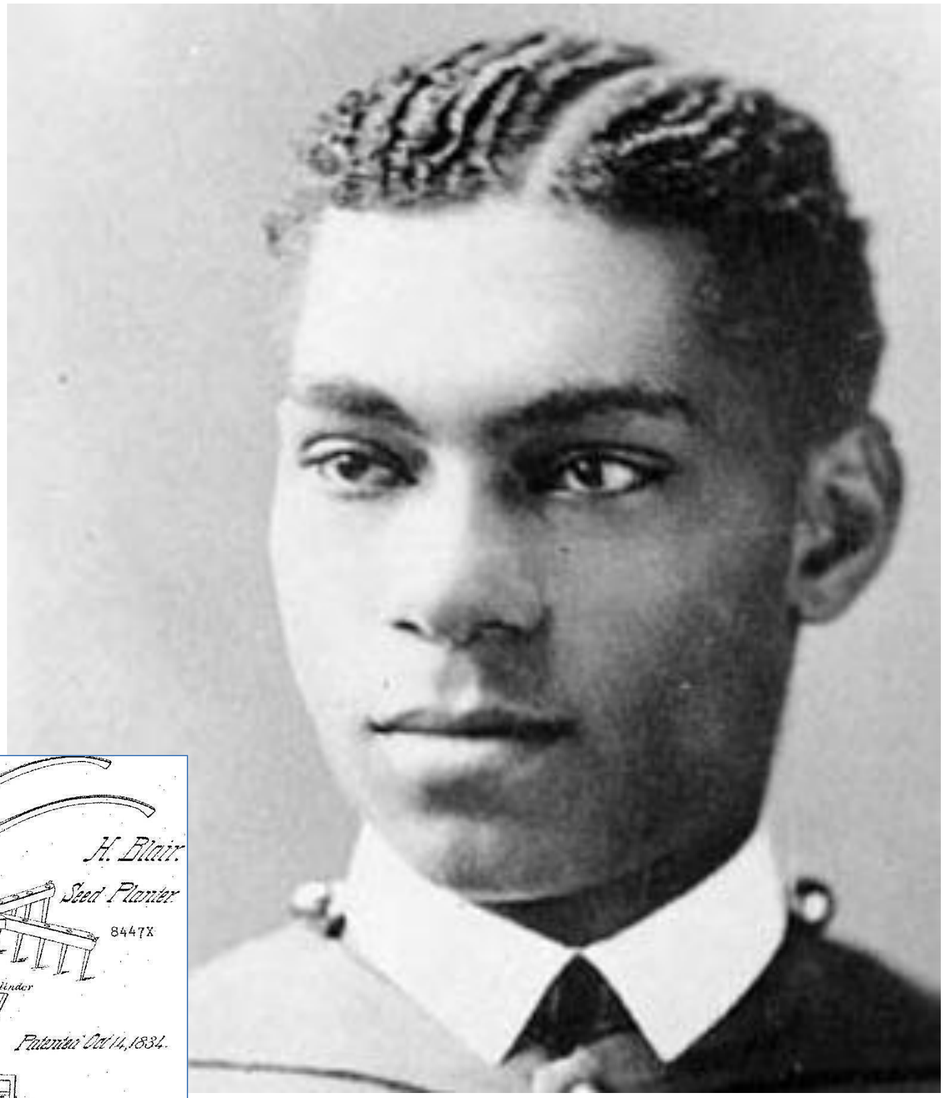
Jan Ernst Matzellger

Jan Ernst Matzeliger was born in 1852 in Dutch Guiana and later moved to the United States. He worked long hours in shoe factories and noticed how slow and expensive shoe production was. As a Black immigrant, he had little support or recognition.

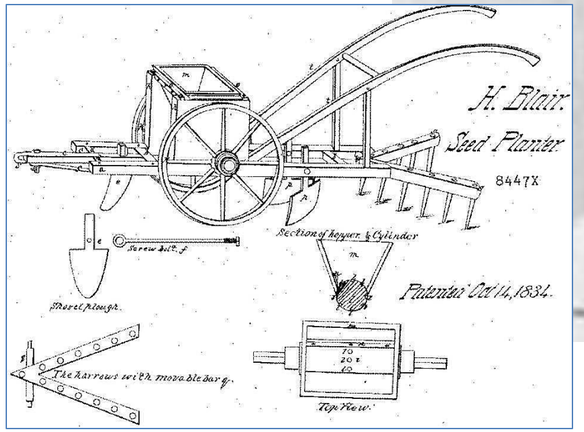
He invented the shoe-lasting machine, which allowed shoes to be mass-produced quickly and cheaply. This invention lowered prices and helped grow the American shoe industry. Sadly, Matzeliger died young and did not live to see the full impact of his invention.

Henry Blair

Henry Blair was born in 1807 and lived as a free Black farmer and inventor. He had no formal education and could not read or write, which made inventing even more challenging. Despite this, he successfully developed new farming tools.



Blair patented a corn planter and a cotton planter that made planting crops faster and more efficient. His inventions reduced labor costs and increased farm productivity. He was one of the earliest African Americans to receive U.S. patents.



Solomon Brown

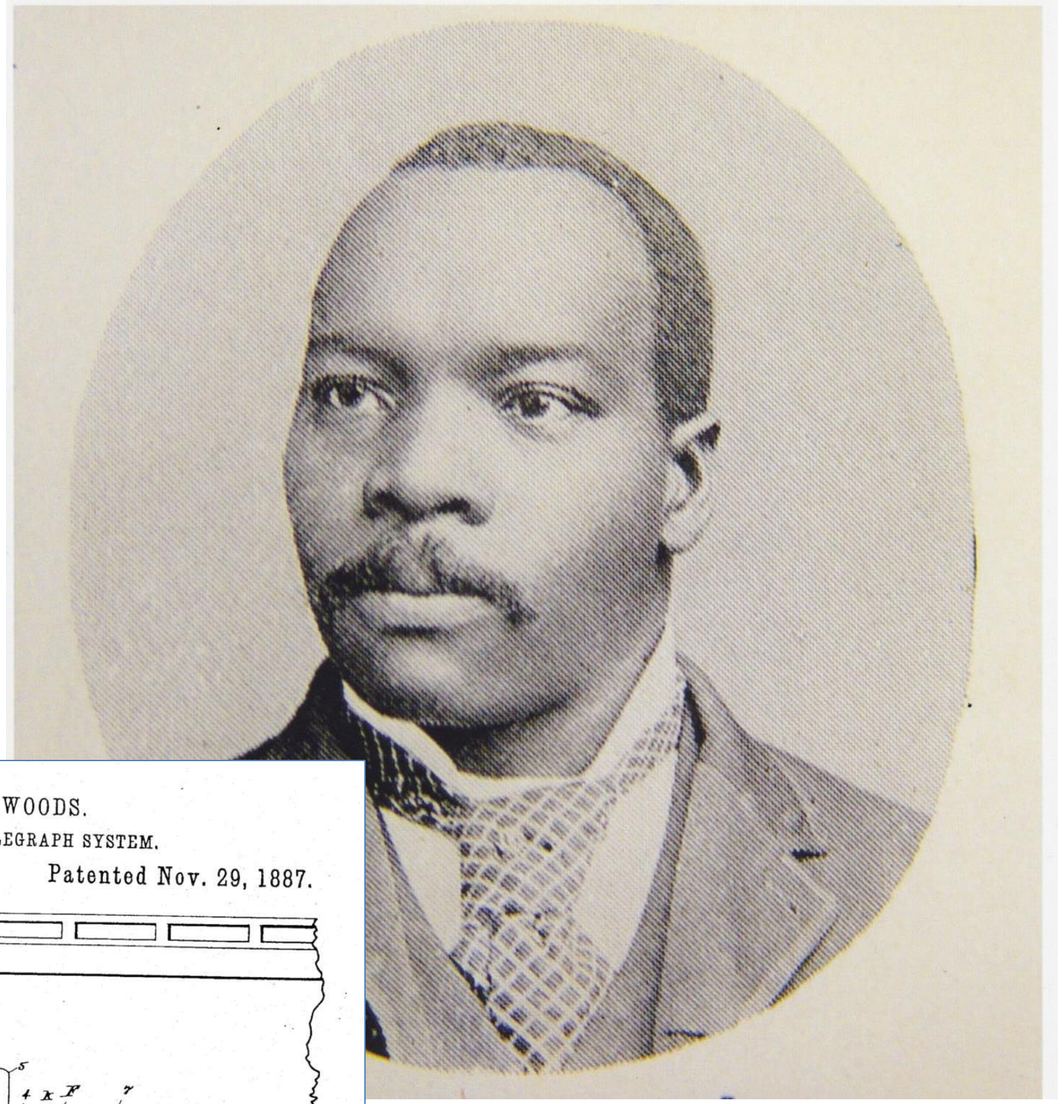
Solomon Brown was born in 1829 and worked as an inventor, illustrator, and assistant at the Smithsonian Institution. He had little formal schooling but educated himself through reading and hands-on learning. Brown believed strongly in sharing knowledge with the public. At age 23, he became the first Black employee of the Smithsonian Institute, becoming a trusted leader among the laborers at the museums.

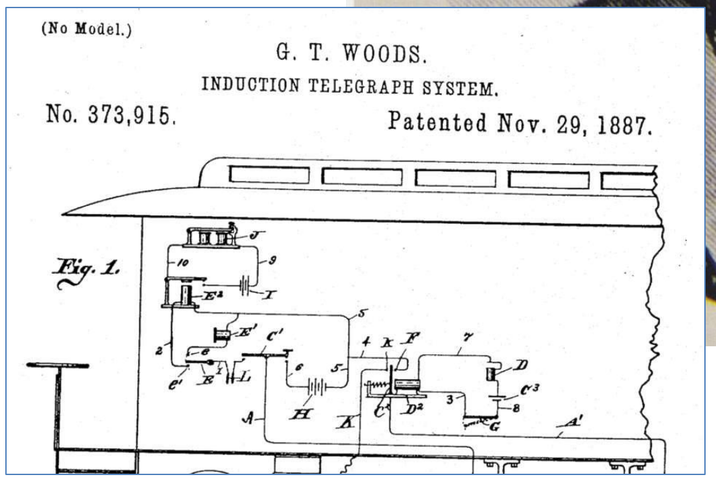
He helped organize scientific exhibits and explain new discoveries to visitors. His work supported public education and scientific progress. Brown also advocated for African American education and innovation.

Granville T. Woods

Granville T. Woods was born in 1856 and showed an early talent for engineering. He faced discrimination and often had his ideas stolen or challenged by others. Despite these challenges, he continued inventing.

Woods created systems that improved railroad safety and communication, including ways for trains to send messages while moving. His inventions helped prevent accidents and supported industrial expansion. He held nearly 60 patents during his lifetime. He was known as the “Black Edison.” He died in 1910.





(No Model.)

G. T. WOODS.

INDUCTION TELEGRAPH SYSTEM.

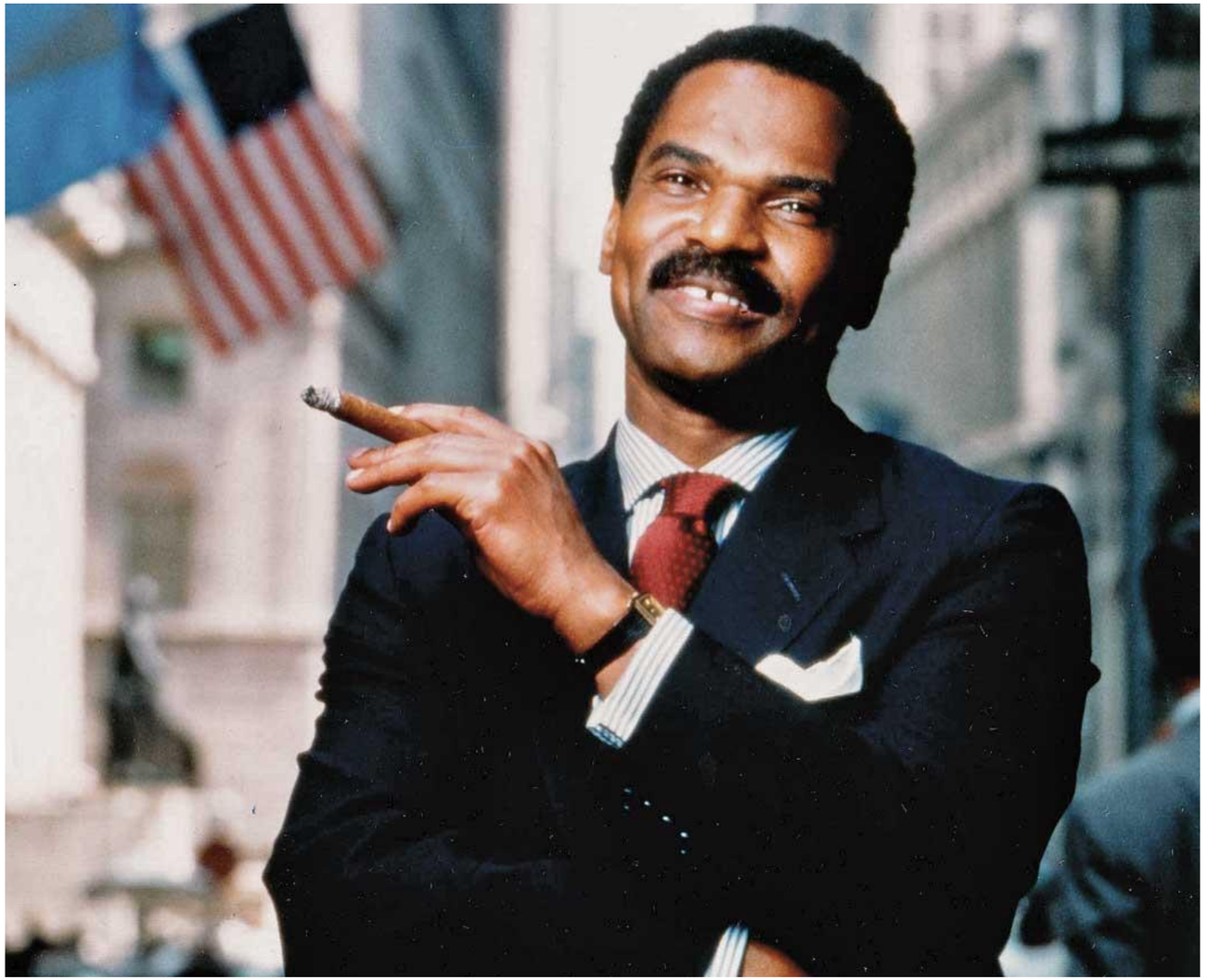
No. 373,915. Patented Nov. 29, 1887.

Fig. 1.

Reginald F. Lewis

Reginald F. Lewis was born in 1942 and grew up in a working-class family. He earned a law degree and entered the world of corporate finance, where African Americans were rarely welcomed. Lewis used strategic thinking and persistence to succeed.

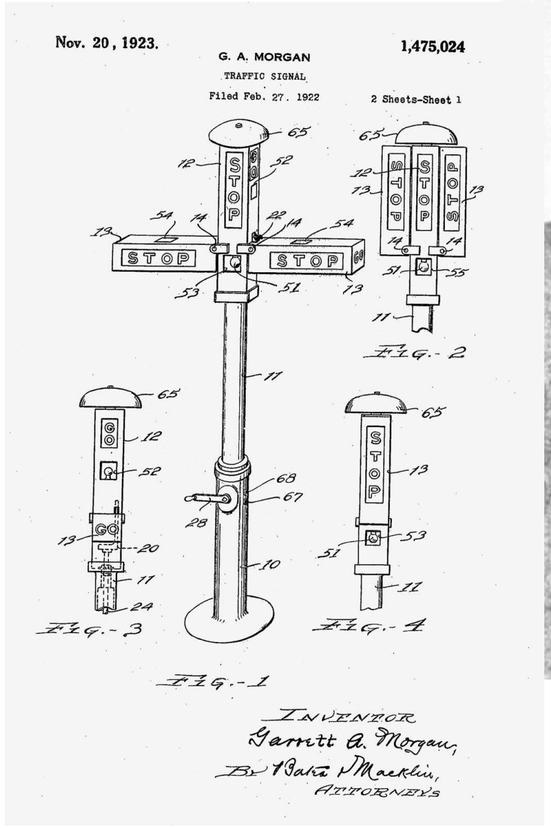
He built TLC Beatrice International into a global company worth over one billion dollars. Lewis became the first African American to lead a billion-dollar business, proving that Black leadership could thrive in global markets. He also supported education and mentorship.



Garrett Morgan

Garrett Morgan was born in 1877 and had little formal education. He taught himself mechanics and opened repair shops, where he began inventing. Racism often prevented him from receiving credit for his work.

Morgan invented an early gas mask used by firefighters and rescue workers, as well as an improved traffic signal. His inventions saved lives and improved public safety. He also owned successful businesses, showing how invention could lead to entrepreneurship.


Nov. 20, 1923. G. A. MORGAN 1,475,024

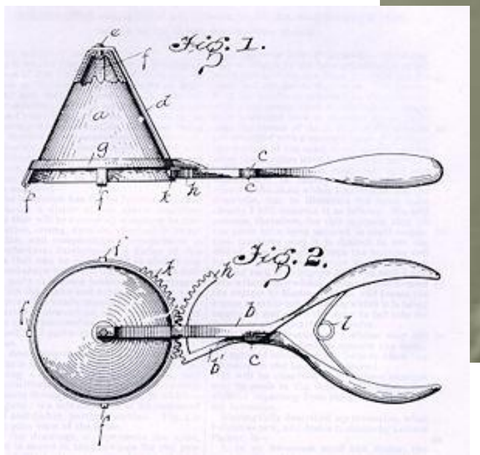
TRAFFIC SIGNAL

Filed Feb. 27, 1922 2 Sheets-Sheet 1

Alfred L. Cralle

Alfred L. Cralle was born in 1866 and worked as a porter and mechanic. While working in food service, he noticed how difficult it was to serve frozen ice cream quickly. This inspired his invention.

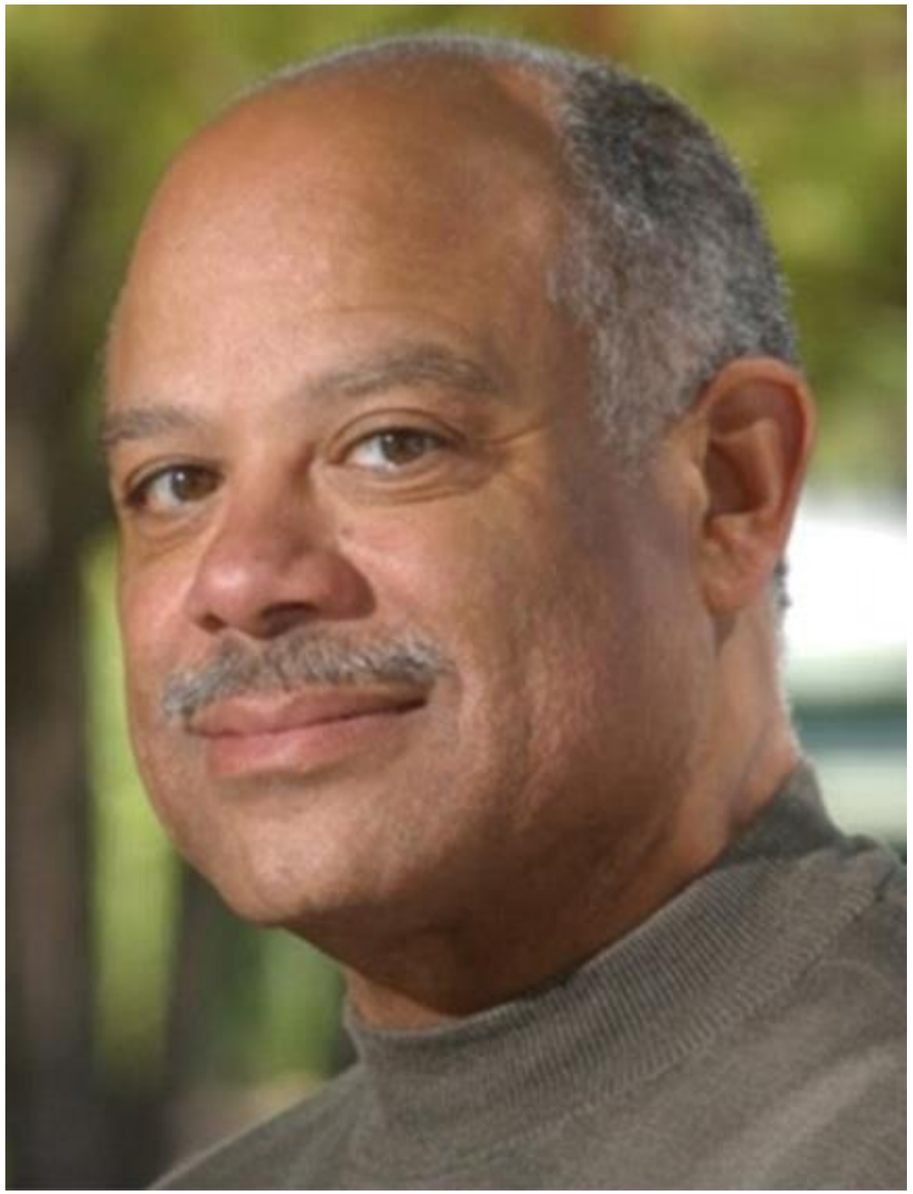
Cralle created the modern ice cream scoop, which made serving faster and cleaner. His invention became widely used in restaurants and businesses. Though simple, it improved efficiency in the food industry.



Mark Dean

Mark Dean was born in 1957 and grew up interested in science and technology. He became an engineer at IBM during the early days of personal computing. As a Black engineer, he often worked in spaces where few people looked like him.

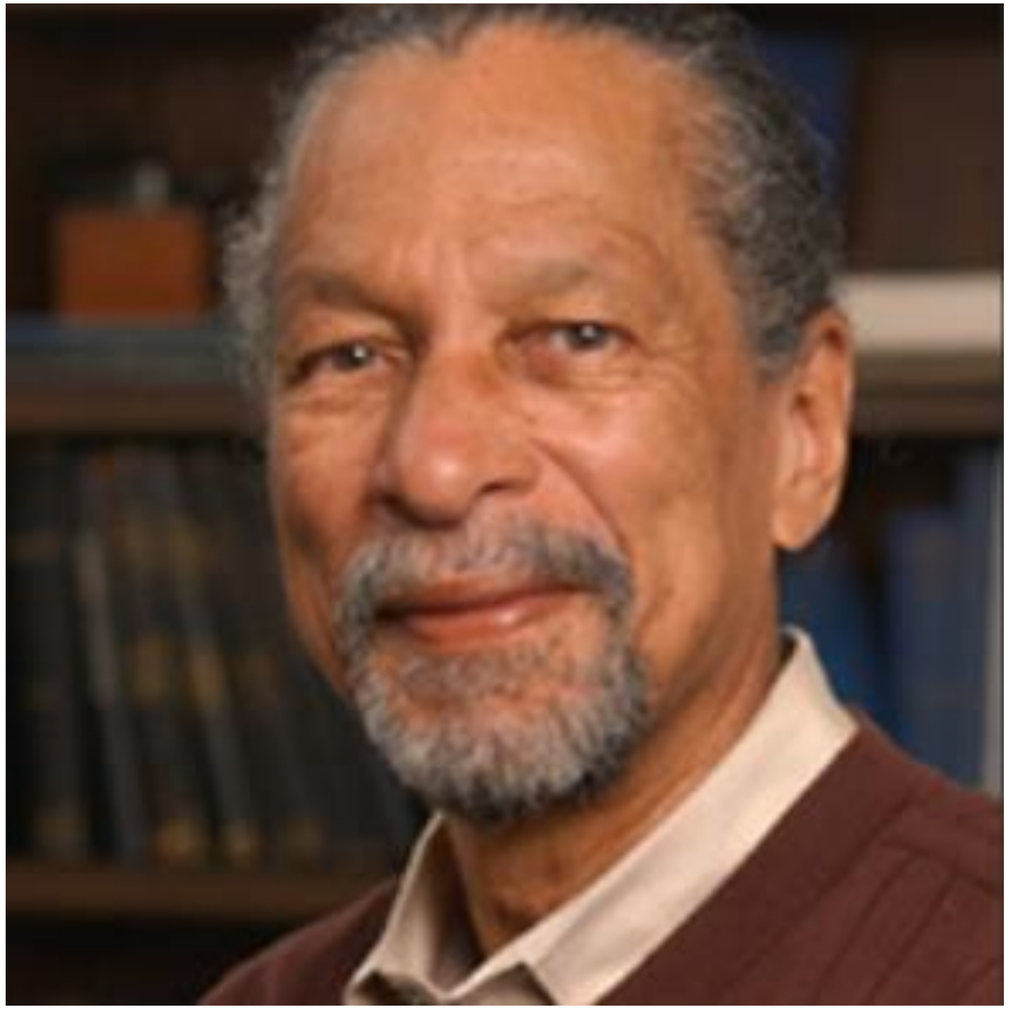
Dean helped design the original IBM personal computer and holds several major patents. His work helped launch the personal computer revolution, which transformed business, education, and daily life. He later became a leader in engineering education.



James. E. West

James E. West was born in 1931 and grew up curious about science. He became a physicist and worked at Bell Laboratories. Early in his career, he faced racial barriers in the scientific community.

West co-invented the electret microphone, now used in phones, hearing aids, and recording devices. This invention lowered costs and improved sound quality worldwide. His work supports global communication and business systems.



Patricia Bath

Patricia Bath was born in 1942 and grew up in Harlem, New York, where her parents encouraged education and curiosity. She became a medical doctor during a time when very few Black women were accepted into medical schools. Throughout her career, she faced discrimination but continued to push for fairness in healthcare.

Bath invented the Laserphaco Probe, a device that improved cataract surgery and restored vision to millions of people worldwide. Her invention lowered long-term healthcare costs and improved productivity for patients who regained sight. She showed how medical innovation can improve both quality of life and economic outcomes.

Roy Clay, Sr.

Roy Clay Sr. was born in 1929 and developed an early interest in mathematics and electronics. He became one of the first African Americans to work as a computer scientist in Silicon Valley, often facing isolation and discrimination in the tech industry.

Clay founded technology companies and worked on early computer systems that supported large businesses. He also mentored young engineers of color, helping expand access to high-paying technology careers. His work highlights how education and mentorship strengthen the technology economy.

A’Lelia Walker

A’Lelia Walker was born in 1885 and was the daughter of Madam C. J. Walker. She received a strong education and helped manage her mother’s growing hair-care empire. As a Black woman in business, she balanced leadership with public expectations.

After her mother’s death, Walker expanded the company’s international reach. She also invested heavily in Black artists, writers, and musicians during the Harlem Renaissance. Her work shows how economic success can support cultural and creative industries. She died in 1931.

Lisa Gelobter

Lisa Gelobter was born in 1971 and became interested in computers at a young age. She studied computer science and worked in early internet and media technology. As a woman of color in tech, she faced barriers but remained focused on innovation.

Gelobter helped develop animation and video technology that shaped how media moves online. Her work influenced the growth of digital advertising, online news, and streaming. She later worked to increase diversity in technology careers, strengthening the future workforce.

Alan Emtage

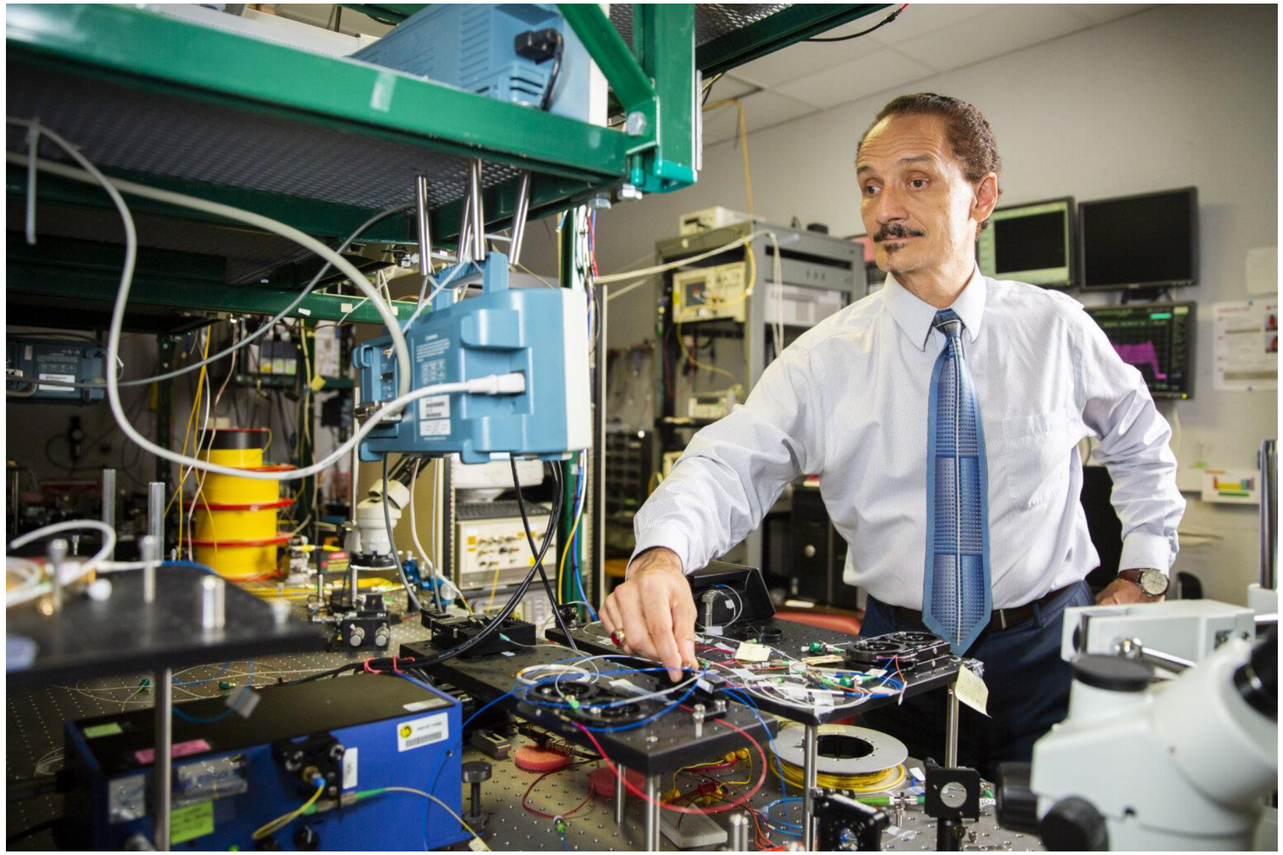
Alan Emtage was born in 1964 and grew up interested in computers and information organization. While working as a student, he noticed how difficult it was to find files on early internet networks.

He created “Archie,” the world’s first internet search engine. This invention helped users locate information quickly and efficiently. Emtage’s work laid the foundation for modern search engines, which are central to today’s digital economy.

Peter J. Delfyett, Jr.

Peter Delfyett Jr. was born in 1968 and became interested in science and engineering early in life. He pursued advanced education in physics and engineering and became a leading researcher.

His work in laser and fiber-optic technology supports high-speed internet and global communication systems. These technologies allow businesses to operate worldwide and share information instantly. Delfyett's career shows how scientific research fuels economic infrastructure.



Samuel L. Younge, Jr.

Samuel Younge Jr. was born in 1944 and grew up during segregation in the South. He became active in the civil rights movement while still a teenager, believing that economic opportunity required equal access.

Younge protested segregation in public businesses, including restaurants and gas stations. He was shot during a protest while trying to use a “Whites-only” bathroom in 1966. His activism highlighted how discrimination limited economic participation. Though his life was short, his actions helped push the nation toward fairer economic access.

Marian Croak

Marian Croak was born in 1955 and became an engineer and researcher in telecommunications. She worked at Bell Labs and later held leadership roles in technology development.

Croak helped develop Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP), which allows people to make phone calls over the internet. This innovation lowered communication costs and supported global business. Her work shows how networks create economic efficiency.

Calvin Butler

Calvin Butler was born in 1971 and built a career in energy and utilities. He worked his way into executive leadership, managing large systems that deliver power to millions of customers.

As a CEO, Butler focuses on infrastructure, sustainability, and economic development. His leadership highlights how energy systems support business growth and everyday life. Utilities play a key role in national and regional economies.

Marie Van Brittan Brown

Marie Van Brittan Brown was born in 1922 and worked as a nurse. Concerned about neighborhood safety, she looked for ways to protect homes more effectively.

She co-invented the first home security system using cameras and monitors. Her invention laid the groundwork for today's security industry. This innovation created new consumer markets focused on safety and protection. She died in 1999 at the age of 76.

Lonnie Johnson

Lonnie Johnson was born in 1949 and excelled in science and engineering. While working as an engineer, he developed ideas for both serious technologies and consumer products.

He invented the Super Soaker water toy, which became a major commercial success. Johnson used profits to fund research in energy and battery technology. His career shows how patents and licensing can support long-term innovation.

Robert L. Johnson

Robert L. Johnson was born in 1946 and worked in public policy and media before founding BET. He recognized that Black audiences were underserved by television networks. BET created greater visibility for the African American community and a new platform for Black-owned business.

BET became the first Black-owned company listed on the New York Stock Exchange. Johnson’s success expanded minority ownership in media and advertising markets. His work shows how representation and capital intersect.

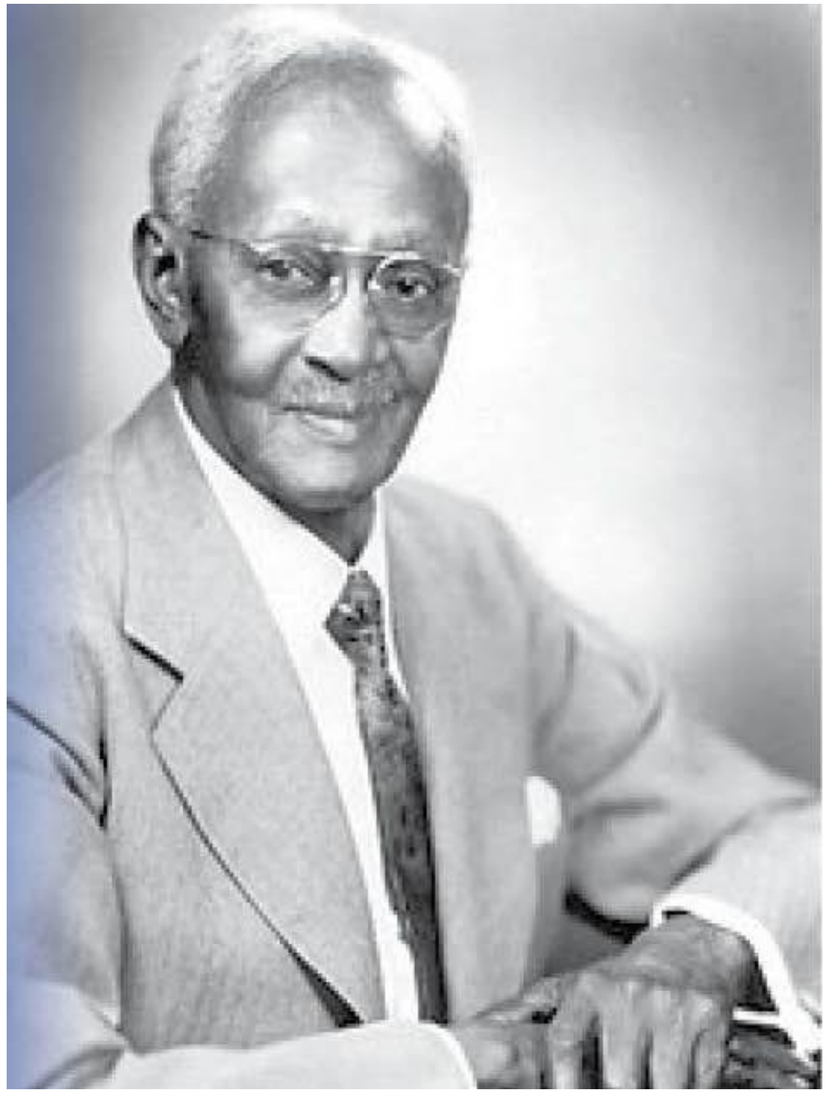
Maggie Lena Walker

Maggie Lena Walker was born in 1864 and grew up in poverty after the Civil War. She believed strongly in saving, cooperation, and economic independence. Walker is best known as the first black woman bank president in the United States. She organized and led the St. Luke Penny Savings Bank from its founding in 1903 to her death in 1934. She played an important role in making Richmond the cradle of black capitalism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Walker founded and led a Black-owned bank that helped families save money, buy homes, and start businesses. Her leadership expanded access to credit during segregation. She demonstrated how banking supports community wealth.

R.R. Wright, Sr.

Richard R. Wright Sr. was born enslaved in 1855 and later became an educator and banker. He believed education and financial institutions were essential for freedom. He helped create Black-owned banks and insurance companies that protected families from financial loss. These institutions built long-term economic stability.



Wright made outstanding contributions to banking, politics, education, and other fields. Wright's work strengthened community-based capitalism. He died in 1947 at the age of 94. One year after his death, Congress passed a bill making February 1st as "National Freedom Day." Wright began this holiday to recognize the day President Lincoln signed the 13th Amendment.

Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander

Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander was born in 1898 and became the first African American woman to earn a PhD in economics. She faced discrimination but persisted in her research and advocacy.

She studied wages, employment, and racial inequality. Her work influenced civil rights policy and fair labor practices. Alexander showed how economic data can drive social change.

A. Philip Randolph

A. Philip Randolph was born in 1889 and became a labor organizer and civil rights leader. He believed economic power was essential to freedom.

He organized the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, a large African American union. He worked to secure better wages and working conditions. His work showed how unions improve labor markets. Randolph connected civil rights to economic justice. He successfully lobbied President F.D.R. during World War II to pass Executive Order 8802, desegregating wartime industries.