

Notable Black Inventors Who Changed the Way We Live

Banner Witcoff honors Black History Month by celebrating and sharing the stories of four notable Black inventors. We invite you to continue to learn about the many Black inventors who have impacted the way we live by clicking [here](#).

Lewis Howard Latimer



Lewis Howard Latimer was born in Chelsea, Massachusetts to parents who had escaped slavery in Virginia just six years before his birth. At age 16, he enlisted in the United States Navy during the Civil War. After receiving an honorable discharge, Lewis took a job at the Crosby and Gould patent law office, where he taught himself mechanical drawing and drafting by observing work at the firm. He was eventually promoted to draftsman and assisted other inventors while designing his own inventions, including an improved railroad car bathroom and an early air conditioning unit. Lewis went on to help draft the patent for Bell's design of the telephone and defended Edison's lightbulb design.

You can read more about Lewis Howard Latimer, his life, and his contributions to intellectual property by [clicking here](#).

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Elijah McCoy

Elijah McCoy is best known for inventing an automatic lubricator used on trains, but his work extended well beyond train lubrications, as he had nearly 60 patents to his name.

Elijah's parents escaped from slavery in Kentucky on the Underground Railroad. They went to Canada, where Elijah was born, and eventually settled in Ypsilanti, Michigan. Elijah trained as an engineer in Scotland but was unable to find an engineering job when he returned to the United States, leaving him to work for the railroad. After studying the



inefficiencies in the existing railroad system of oiling axels, he invented a lubricating cup that evenly distributed oil over the engine's moving parts, allowing trains to run continuously for long periods without pausing for maintenance.

Elijah also developed designs for an ironing board, lawn sprinkler, and other machines. You can learn more about Elijah McCoy by [clicking here](#).

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Judy W. Reed

Judy W. Reed is believed to be the first Black woman to receive a United States patent.

In January of 1884, Judy applied for a patent on her "Dough Kneader and Roller," an improved version to the existing dough kneaders. Her device allowed the dough to mix more evenly and then be passed through two intermeshed rollers carved with corrugated slats, which act as kneaders. On September 23, 1884, she received Patent No. 305,474 for her invention.


Aside from this document, there is no other records of her life. You can read more about Judy W. Reed's patent by [clicking here](#).

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Madam C.J. Walker

After suffering from a scalp ailment, Madam C.J. Walker invented her own line of Black hair products. She promoted her products by traveling around the country giving demonstrations and eventually established her own laboratories to manufacture the products and train sales beauticians. Her business led her to become one of the first Black women to become a self-made millionaire.

Madam C.J. Walker, born Sarah Breedlove, was the first in her family to be freeborn. She worked as a washerwoman, earning enough to send her daughter to public school, while she attended night school whenever she could.

You can learn more about Madam C.J. Walker by [clicking here](#).

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