Four Notable Black Inventors Who Impacted Our Day-to-Day Lives

Cataract treatment, ironing boards, traffic lights, and glaucoma treatment. All of these products have impacted our day-to-day lives, and all of these products were created by Black inventors.

Honor Black History Month by taking time to learn about these four notable Black inventors with their stories below. You can continue to learn about the many Black inventors who have shaped the way we live by clicking here.

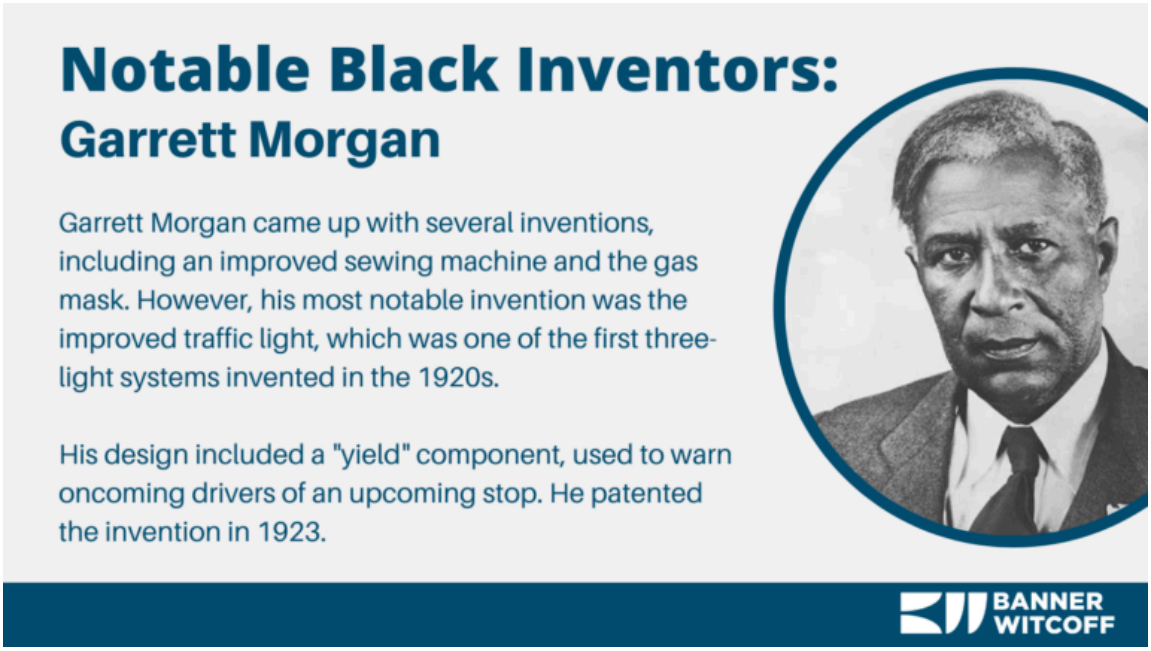
- **Patricia Bath** is considered to be a pioneer in ophthalmology. In 1973, she became the first African American to complete a residency in ophthalmology and just three years later she co-founded the American Institute for the Prevention of Blindness.

  In 1983, she helped develop the Ophthalmology Residency Training program at UCLA-Drew, which she also chaired – making her the first woman in the nation to hold such a position.

  In 1988 she became the first Black female doctor to receive a patent for a medical purpose, when she invented the Laserphaco Probe. The device used laser technology to create a less painful and more precise treatment of cataracts. Learn more about Patricia Bath here.

- **Garrett Morgan** patented several inventions in his lifetime including the improved sewing machine, a hair-straightening product, a respiratory device that would later be the blueprint for WWI gas masks, and one of the first automatic three-way traffic signal systems.

  In 1923, Garrett patented his improved traffic light, which was improved with a “yield” component to warn oncoming drivers of an upcoming stop, a basic version of the traffic light we see today. He later sold the rights to General Electric. You can read more about Garrett Morgan, his life, and inventions here.

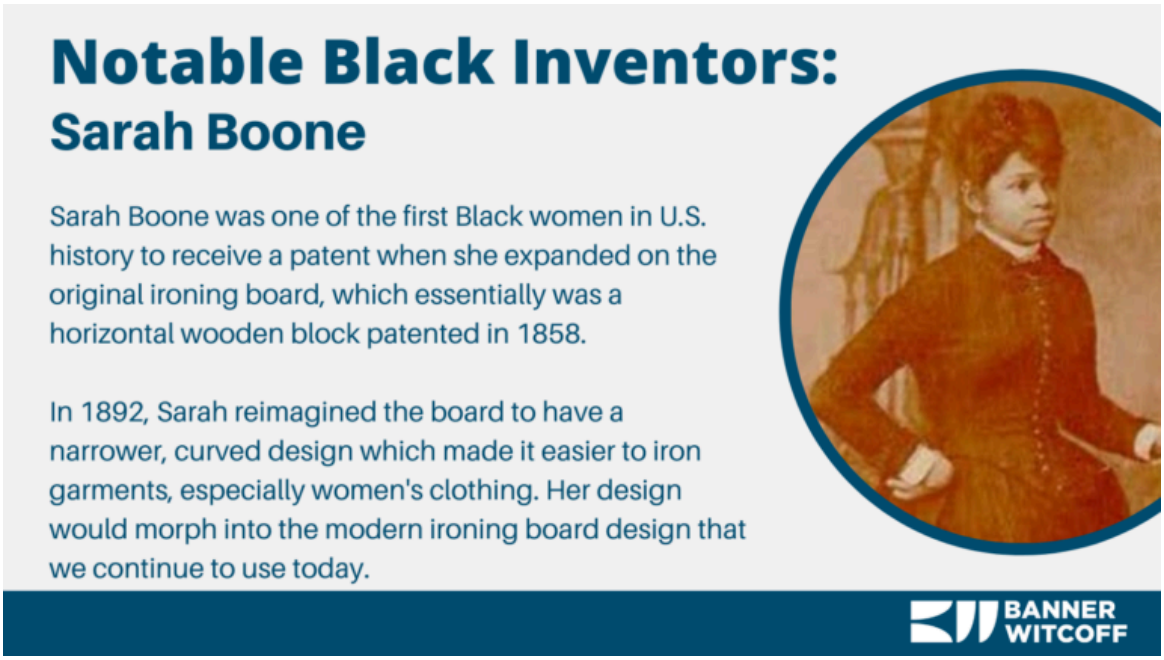


- **Sarah Boone** was born into slavery in 1832, and is believed to have earned her freedom in 1847.

  After the Civil War she and her husband migrated to New Haven, Connecticut where she worked as a dressmaker. When she began to face fierce competition in the industry, she knew she needed to catch the eyes of potential buyers.

So, she created a better way to effectively iron her dresses, especially the corsets that were popular. While other dressmakers were ironing their dresses on wood planks, poorly crafted for tight materials, Sarah created a curved ironing board that allowed her to shift the dress without creating wrinkles. She also added padding which eliminated impressions caused by the wood board, and made it collapsible for easy storage.

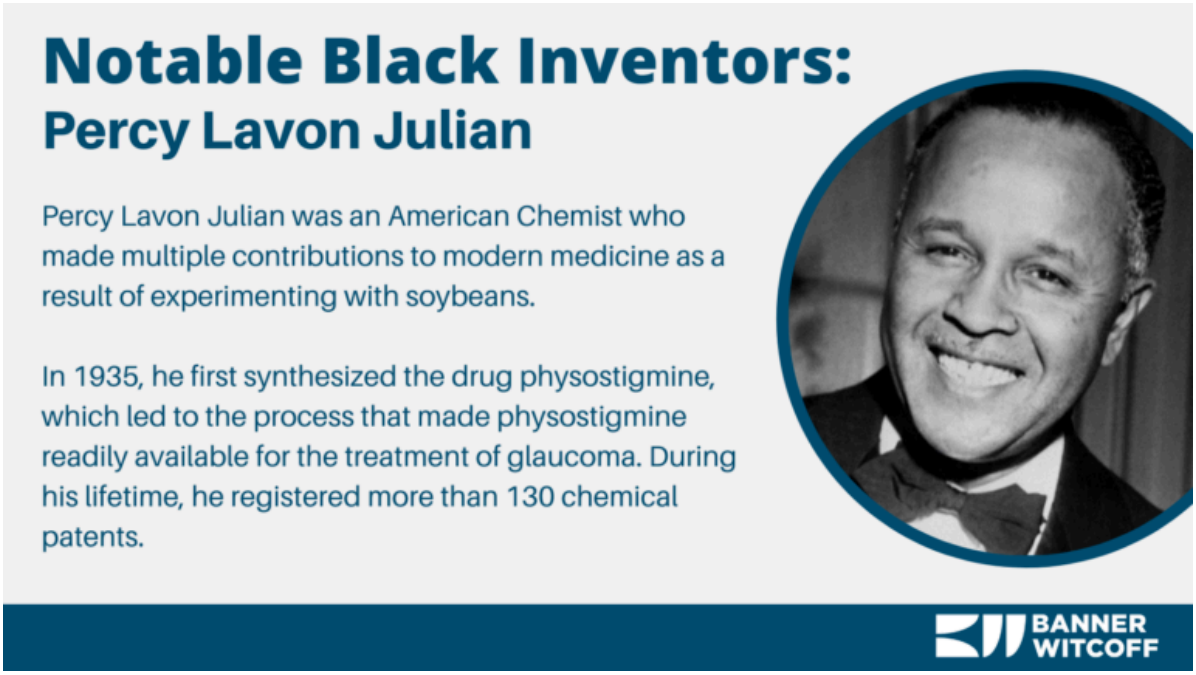
Sarah applied for a patent for her creation in 1891, and was awarded it in 1892. You can read more about Sarah Boone and her invention here.



- **Percy Lavon Julian** was a pioneer in chemistry, whose research led to the synthesis of drugs to treat glaucoma and arthritis.

  In 1935, he first synthesized the drug physostigmine to create an easily accessible drug treatment for glaucoma.

  The American Chemical Society recognized his synthesis of physostigmine as “one of the top 25 achievements in the history of American chemistry” in 1999. Percy Lavon Julian would go on to register more than 130 chemical patents in his lifetime. You can read more about Percy Lavon Julian here.



Posted: February 1, 2022