

# Black History Month – Impromptu Prompts

## OBJECTS

*Compiled in partnership with Wiley College*



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### Carbon Filament



Inventor and engineer Lewis Latimer was born in Chelsea, Massachusetts, on September 4, 1848. He collaborated with science greats Hiram Maxim and Thomas Edison. One of Latimer's greatest inventions was the carbon filament, a vital component of the light bulb. His inventions didn't stop there. Working with Alexander Graham Bell, Latimer helped draft the patent for Bell's design of the telephone. This genius also designed an improved railroad car bathroom and an early air conditioning unit. So the next time you're escaping a hot day inside your cool house, don't forget to thank Lewis Latimer!

<https://thinkgrowth.org/14-black-inventors-you-probably-didnt-know-about-3c0702cc63d2>

## Super Soaker



Did you ever enjoy water gun fights as a kid? Well, meet Lonnie Johnson, the man that gave us the most famous water gun—the Super Soaker. Lonnie wasn't a toymaker; he actually was an aerospace engineer for NASA with a resume boasting a stint with the U.S. Air Force, work on the Galileo Jupiter probe and Mars Observer project, and more than 40 patents.

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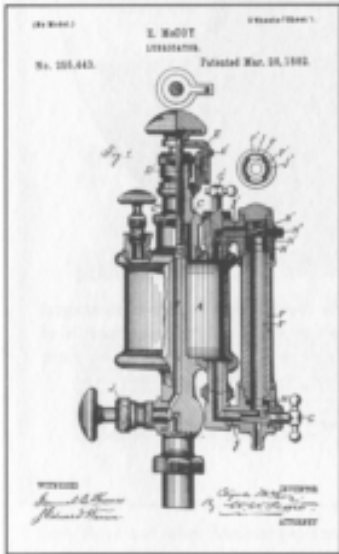
## Bloodmobile



Charles Drew was a physician, surgeon, and medical researcher who worked with a team at Red Cross on groundbreaking discoveries around blood transfusions. In World War II, he played a major role in developing the first large-scale blood banks and blood plasma programs. He also invented the first bloodmobile—refrigerated trucks that, to this day, safely transport stored blood to the location where it is needed most. Drew was one of the most prominent doctors working in his field, and one of the only African Americans, during a time when blood donation was still separated along lines of race. Drew eventually resigned from his position with the American Red Cross over their insistence on adhering to this policy. It was 1950 before the Red Cross finally recognized all blood as being equal.

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## Train Lubricating Cup

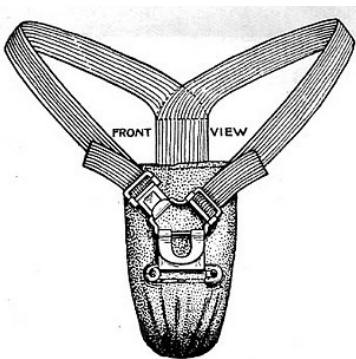


In an effort to improve efficiency and eliminate the frequent stopping necessary for lubrication of trains, Elijah McCoy devised a method of automating the task. In 1872, he developed a “lubricating cup” that could automatically drip oil when and where needed—vital in avoiding sticking to the track. The lubricating cup met with enormous success and orders for it came in from railroad companies all over the country. It was so popular that when other inventors attempted to steal his idea and sell their own versions of the device, companies were not fooled. They insisted on the authentic device, calling it “the Real McCoy.”

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## Sanitary Belt



Mary Davidson and her sister Mildred patented many practical inventions. They didn’t have technical education, but they were both exceptional at spotting ways to make peoples’ lives better. Together, they invented the sanitary belt. Later, Mary invented the moisture-resistant pocket for the belt. While disabled from multiple sclerosis, Mary went on to invent the walker and the toilet tissue holder.

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## Mailbox



In 1891, anyone interested in mailing a letter would have to make the long trip to the post office. Philip B. Downing designed a metal box with four legs which he patented on October 27, 1891. He called his device a street letter box and it is the predecessor of today's mailbox. One year earlier, Downing patented an electrical switch for railroads which allowed railroad workers to supply or shut off power to trains at appropriate times. Based on this design, innovators would later create electrical switches such as light switches used in the home.

<http://blackinventor.com/philip-downing/>

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## Modern Home Video Game Console



Anyone who owns a Playstation, Wii, or Xbox should know Gerald A. Lawson's name. Jerry created the first home video game system that used interchangeable cartridges, offering gamers a chance to play a variety of games and giving video game makers a way to earn profits by selling individual games, a business model that exists today.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fairchild\\_Channel\\_F](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fairchild_Channel_F)

## Potato Chip



George Crum was born as George Speck in 1822 in Saratoga Lake, New York, the son of a Huron Native American mother and an African American father who worked as a jockey. He worked for a while as a mountain guide and trapper in the Adirondack Mountains in New York. In 1853, he became the head chef at the Cary Moon's Lake House in Lake Saratoga, New York, and on one evening set out preparing the evening dinner for the guests. He intended to make french fries, but a guest complained that they were too thick. Annoyed, he prepared another batch and sliced the potatoes extremely thin. After deep frying them in oil, he found them

very thin and very crisp—and after adding salt, the guests loved them. George began preparing the potatoes this way, and they would soon become known as potato chips. In 1860, George decided to open his own restaurant on Malta Avenue in Saratoga Lake. He featured potato chips as appetizers on each table. The restaurant was very successful and operated for 30 years, closing in 1890. Unfortunately, he never patented the potato chip, nor sought to market them outside of his restaurant. A few years after he retired, however, potato chips were mass marketed by others and would eventually become a six billion dollar a year industry. George Crum died in 1904 at the age of 92 and left behind the legacy of creating the greatest snack food of all time.

<http://blackinventor.com/george-crum/>

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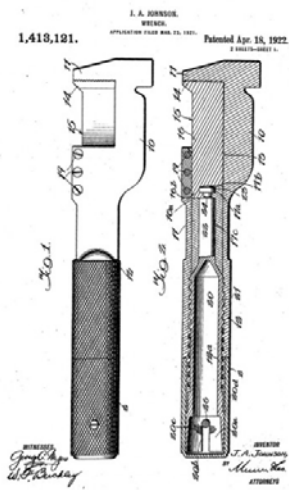
## Travel Guide published by the Afro-American in the 1940s



African Americans had to plan their road trips carefully to identify restaurants, gas stations, and other spots in unfamiliar places to avoid humiliation or potential violence from being in places where they weren't welcome. These guides offered reliable information that previously had been available only through word of mouth.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/lifestyle/national-museum-of-african-american-history-and-culture/must-see-exhibit-items/>

## Wrench



Jack Johnson is one of the most interesting inventors ever, not simply because of his invention but more so because of his celebrated and controversial life. Johnson was born on March 31, 1878, in Galveston, Texas, under the name John Arthur Johnson and spent much of his teenage life working on boats and along the city's docks. He began boxing in 1897 and quickly became an accomplished and feared fighter. Standing 6' 1" and weighing 192 lbs., Johnson captured the "Colored Heavyweight Championship of the World" on February 3, 1903, in Los Angeles, California, and became the World Heavyweight Champion in 1908. He defeated Tommy Burns for the title and thereby became the first Black man to hold the World Heavyweight Title, a fact that did not endear him to the hearts of white boxing fans. Johnson was extremely confident about his capabilities, and defeated everyone he faced with ease. He also bucked many of the social "rules" of the day and openly dated White women. This eventually got him into trouble in 1912 when he was

arrested for violation of the Mann Act, a law often used to prevent Black men from traveling with White women. He was charged with taking his White girlfriend, Lucille Cameron, across state lines across state lines for "immoral purposes." Although he and Lucille married later in the year, he was convicted of the crime by Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis (who would later become the Commissioner of Major League Baseball) and was sentenced to Federal prison for one year. Before he could be imprisoned, he and Lucille fled to Europe. Johnson eventually returned to the United States and was sent to Leavenworth Federal Prison in Kansas. While in prison, Johnson found need for a tool which would help tighten or loosen fastening devices. He therefore crafted a tool and eventually patented it on April 18, 1922, calling it a wrench. Jack Johnson died on June 10, 1946, in an automobile accident in Raleigh, North Carolina, and was elected to the Boxing Hall of Fame in 1954. Although many boxing fans are unaware of the life of the first Black Heavyweight Boxing Champion, they probably utilize his invention routinely around their homes.

<http://blackinventor.com/jack-johnson/>

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## Training aircraft used by Tuskegee Institute



The brightly painted open cockpit plane hangs overhead as a stunning reminder of the bravery of World War II pilots.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/lifestyle/national-museum-of-african-american-history-and-culture/must-see-exhibit-items/>

## Door with rescue markings from Hurricane Katrina



In the days after Hurricane Katrina inundated New Orleans, rescuers painted "X" codes on the doors of houses to indicate which rescue team had surveyed the property, on what date, how many people (or bodies) were inside and what they found there. Known informally as "Katrina Crosses," the codes became part of a painful new iconography of race, neglect, indifference and poverty as the nation grappled with a bungled response to one of its most devastating natural disasters.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/lifestyle/national-museum-of-african-american-history-and-culture/must-see-exhibit-items/>

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## Jacket emblazoned with “Black Unity Black Power”



Vietnam soldiers on leave on the Japanese island of Okinawa would frequently buy customized jackets. This one, with its black power symbol of the fist, emphasizes that racial struggle was also present away from home.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/lifestyle/national-museum-of-african-american-history-and-culture/must-see-exhibit-items/>

## Boombox owned by Chuck D of Public Enemy



These battery-powered, portable music players, introduced in the mid-1970s, helped spread the culture-changing sounds of hip-hop. The museum also has the boombox featured in the Spike Lee movie *Do the Right Thing*, in a scene that dramatizes its power as a cultural symbol.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/lifestyle/national-museum-of-african-american-history-and-culture/must-see-exhibit-items/>

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## James Brown's black cape



The "King of Funk" and "Godfather of Soul" was renowned as a live performer. His cape was a vital part of the raw electricity Brown unleashed onstage.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/lifestyle/national-museum-of-african-american-history-and-culture/must-see-exhibit-items/>



## Book of paper dolls from TV show



Features an African American actress in a starring role as a nurse and not as a maid or other type of servant.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/lifestyle/national-museum-of-african-american-history-and-culture/must-see-exhibit-items/>

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## Althea Gibson's tennis racket



Gibson broke the color line in what was perhaps the whitest of sports. In 1957, she became the first African American to win the Wimbledon women's singles championship. Gibson was the top-ranked American player. She won 56 singles and doubles titles, including 11 majors.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/lifestyle/national-museum-of-african-american-history-and-culture/must-see-exhibit-items/>

## Tommie Smith's warm-up suit from 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico City



Upon receiving a gold medal for the 200-meter race, Smith and bronze medalist John Carlos raised their gloved fists -- a black-power salute -- in a silent but forceful protest of racial discrimination. The controversial move led to their early dismissal from the Games.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/lifestyle/national-museum-of-african-american-history-and-culture/must-see-exhibit-items/>

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## U.S. passport belonging to James Baldwin



A vocal opponent of racial discrimination, Baldwin's official document, from August 2, 1965, depicts the man behind the legend.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/lifestyle/national-museum-of-african-american-history-and-culture/must-see-exhibit-items/>

## Desk from Hope School in Pomaria, South Carolina



This simple desk was used between 1925 and 1954 in one of the 5,000 so-called Rosenwald Schools, a network created by Booker T. Washington and Sears Roebuck executive Julius Rosenwald to educate African American children in the segregated South.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/lifestyle/national-museum-of-african-american-history-and-culture/must-see-exhibit-items/>