
UCF Forum

2-18-2015

History Curriculum Needs More Coverage of Black Inventors

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STARS Citation

Major, Anthony (2015). History curriculum needs more coverage of black inventors. UCF Today, 2015-02-18. Retrieved from <https://today.ucf.edu/history-curriculum-need-coverage-black-inventors/>

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History Curriculum Needs More Coverage of Black Inventors

By Anthony Major

UCF Forum columnist

Wednesday, February 18, 2015

There is a reason we study Russian and European history as an integral part of our history curriculum. History is required from pre-K to college because it is a vital part of knowing how you and your country came to be.

History also helps shape perceptions about the people being studied. However, no matter how much people of African ancestry achieve, there often continues to be negative perceptions. Perhaps, in part, because we are taught so little about what they have contributed to the world. Our educational system fails to teach black history beyond Rosa Parks, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which today is under attack.

I suspect that if more people were aware of the important contributions made by those of African ancestry, there would be a newfound respect and admiration - even by others of the same heritage - for those who helped to change so much for so many.

What we don't know about the firsts and inventions by people of African ancestry - many who were slaves or children of slaves dropped off in all parts of the world - could go a long way in changing some of those perceptions if that part of American history were an essential part of the curriculum.

For example, we learned that Hippocrates was called the "father of medicine." But according to some historians, ancient Egyptian Imhotep, who lived approximately 2,600 years before Hippocrates, diagnosed and treated more than 200 diseases. He is believed by some to be the real "father of medicine."

In observance of Black History Month, here is a partial list of some of the notable black inventors and developers of ideas:

Garrett A. Morgan

Traffic signal, 1923

Breathing device (which became the blueprint for World War I gas masks), 1914

Dr. Charles R. Drew

Blood bank, 1940

Lewis Latimer

The process of manufacturing the carbon filament for the light bulb, 1882

Latimer also helped draft the patent for Alexander Graham Bell's design for the telephone, 1876.

Elijah McCoy

Automatic lubricator for oiling steam engines and trains, 1872

Revolutionized America's transportation system.

Frederick M. Jones

Cooling system on refrigerated trucks, 1940,

Air conditioning unit, 1949

Alexander Miles

Elevator, 1867

J.E. Matzeliger

Shoe lasting machine, 1883

Joseph R. Winters

Improved fire-escape ladder, 1878

Granville T. Woods

Telephone system and apparatus, 1887

Railway telegraphy, 1888

Apparatus for transmission of messages by electricity, 1885.

Woods defeated a lawsuit by Thomas Edison that challenged his patents, and turned down Edison's offer to make him a partner. The patent for his device, which combined the telephone and telegraph, was bought by Alexander Graham Bell.

Lee S. Burridge and Newman R. Marshman

Typewriting machine, 1885

William B. Purvis

Fountain pen, 1890

John Stanard

Refrigerator, 1891

Issac R. Johnson

Bicycle frame (collapsible), 1899

Sarah Boone

Ironing board, 1892

John Albert Burr

Lawn mower, 1899

George F. Grant

Golf tee, 1899

Madam C. J. Walker

Created hair products for black Americans, 1906

She was the first female of African ancestry to become a millionaire.

Marie Van Brittan Brown and Albert Brown

Home security system utilizing television surveillance, 1969

Dr. Patricia Bath (ophthalmologist)

Laserphaco probe, 1986

Lonnie G. Johnson

Super Soaker (water toy), 1988

These are just a few of the thousands of inventions by people of African ancestry, most of whom have several inventions, some even holding upwards of 30 patents.

Remarkably most of them had only a little elementary school education. These are significant contributions to the world, made by a people who were descendants of slaves.

African-Americans should stand tall and feel a sense of pride in the accomplishments of their forefathers.

America should stand tall. After all, it is American history. If this information were a required part of our curriculum, imagine how inspired our children would become and be motivated to achieve their own dreams. As we learn more of our country's rich history, hopefully perceptions of people of African ancestry will begin to change, and with it, the way we judge them.

We look back to history to create a better future - so change the content, change the perception.

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