

## OUR AMAZING HISTORY!

*by Susan Leonard, NAACP Corvallis/Albany Branch Member*

Do you know what the following items have in common?\*

- Dry cleaning
- 3-light traffic signal
- Refrigeration trucks
- Automatic elevator doors
- Color computer monitors
- Laser cataract surgery
- Wooden golf tees
- Super Soaker squirt gun

All these things were invented by, or had major improvements designed by, African Americans!



February is Black History Month when we celebrate together and educate ourselves about the contributions of African Americans to our country. It is a time to focus on many aspects of the narrative of black people, not just slavery and the Civil Rights Movement but the breadth and depth of the impact African Americans have made on the U.S. throughout our history.

Carter G. Woodson is considered the Father of Black History. He was born to parents who had been enslaved, and as a child Carter received scant formal education. By the age of 19, he had taught himself the fundamentals and was able to enter high school and complete it in two years. He went on to receive his doctorate from Harvard. Woodson noticed that textbooks largely ignored the history of America's black population so he took on the challenge of writing that history. Woodson and Jesse E. Moorland founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History. Together they sponsored the first national Negro History Week in 1926. They chose the second

week of February because it coincided with the February 12th birthdays of Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass. In 1976, President Gerald Ford officially recognized Black History Month and it has been proclaimed by every president since.

February 12 is important for another reason – it is the date in 1909 that the NAACP was founded on the centennial of Lincoln’s birth. A deadly race riot in Springfield, Illinois in 1908 spurred a group of people to issue a call to meet to discuss racial justice. Among the 60 who signed the call were W.E.B. Du Bois, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Mary White Ovington, and Dr. Henry Moscowitz, a group of both black and white activists. The newly-formed NAACP echoed the focus of Du Bois’ Niagara Movement for civil rights. In 1910, Du Bois founded *The Crisis*, the official journal of the NAACP, which remains an important publication today, highlighting race issues and news and events on local and national levels. Many influential people have been members and supporters of the NAACP – just a few include Jackie Robinson, Harry Belafonte, Lena Horne, Julian Bond, Eleanor Roosevelt, John Dewey, and Charles Darrow. Current leaders are Derrick Johnson, President, and Leon W. Russell, Chairman of the National Board of Directors. The 111th NAACP National Convention will be held July 25 to 29, 2020, in Boston (just get on highway 20 and head east!). It is sure to be an amazing event of education and inspiration.

The African Americans who have contributed to our culture and history are legion. Here are just a few names and other resources to inspire you for further research. May we continue to work toward a future when the impact Africa Americans have made is part of our country’s collective consciousness and an integral part of our education year-round.

*\* More information about the list of inventions:*

*Dry cleaning - Thomas L. Jennings in 1821*

*3-light traffic signal - Garrett Morgan in 1923*

*Refrigeration trucks - Frederick McKinley Jones in 1940*

*Automatic elevator doors - Alexander Miles in 1887*

*Color computer monitors - Mark Dean in the 1990’s*

*Laser cataract surgery - Dr. Patricia Bath in 1988*

*Wooden golf tees - George Franklin Grant in 1899*

*Super Soaker squirt gun - Lonnie George Johnson in 1989*

*Other resources: NAACP National Convention 2020 - [www.naacp.org/boston-2020](http://www.naacp.org/boston-2020)*

Teaching For Change - book lists and parent/teacher resources - [www.teachingforchange.org](http://www.teachingforchange.org)

Children’s/Young Adult books:

A Dance Like Starlight about prima ballerina Janet Collins

Take a Picture of Me, James VanDerZee, famous photographer and artist

Jackie Ormes: The First African American Woman Cartoonist (She was also an activist.)

African Americans of note:

Gwen Ifill - journalist

Elizabeth Catlett - artist

Shirley Chisholm - politician

Faith Ringgold - artist

Marian Anderson - opera singer

Katherine Johnson - mathematician

Lorraine Hansberry - author

Gordon Parks - photographer

Jean-Michel Basquiat - artist

Miles Davis - musician

Leontyne Price - opera singer

John Coltrane - musician

Ta-Nehisi Coates - journalist/author

Nikki Giovanni - poet

Lucy McBath - politician

Shuwanza Goff - U.S. House of Representatives Floor Director