

The Great Inventor

Sewing machines caught Garrett Morgan's imagination and he opened his own repair shop. He also developed plans for an improved sewing machine and obtained the **patent** for it.

Garrett Morgan invented a new chemical solution to smooth woollen fibres but quickly saw an opportunity for using this to flatten hair fibres. Before long, he had set up his own company and G. A. Morgan Hair Refining Company was selling the new hair-straightening product to Black Americans.

After watching an accident between an early car and a horse-drawn carriage, Morgan patented his three-light traffic system which included a 'caution' light. It would form the basis for our three-light traffic lights today.

Did You Know...?

A patent is a way of registering your product or invention so that other people cannot make, use, copy or sell it without your permission.

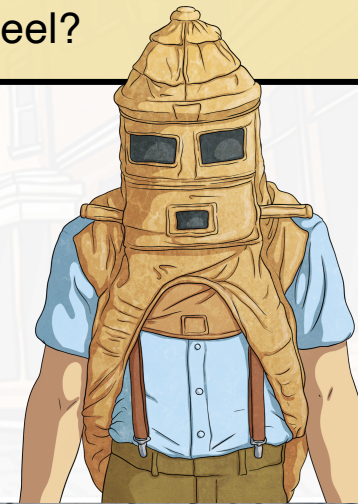
The 1916 Cleveland Tunnel Disaster

In 1914, Garrett Morgan filed a new patent for a breathing device which would protect the wearer from inhaling smoke and poisonous gases. It was called the Morgan National Safety Hood. It could be used to protect firefighters. His design would be the prototype for the gas masks used to save soldiers from gas attacks during the First World War.

In 1916, in Cleveland, there was an accident as workers were drilling tunnels under Lake Erie. A huge explosion trapped and killed many workers. On hearing of the incident, Garrett Morgan and his brothers rushed to the scene and used their breathing devices to go into the tunnel and rescue workers. Sadly, instead of being hailed as heroes, Morgan and his brother were not recognised in later press reports. At a time of discrimination, people did not want to honour a Black man. In fact, many people stopped buying Garrett Morgan's products when they realised that he was the true inventor. It would be many years before he and his brother would be declared heroes.

Think

How do you think Garrett Morgan felt after the 1916 Cleveland Tunnel Disaster? How does his treatment make you feel?



Fighting Against Discrimination

Garrett Morgan faced discrimination throughout his lifetime. At the time he lived in America, racial tensions were high. Some people would not buy products from him because he was Black. At one point, Garrett Morgan had to hire a White man to act as the inventor while he pretended to be his assistant.

Garrett Morgan kept inventing throughout his lifetime. He also took on the role of community leader. He was a great supporter of Black people's rights in America: donating to colleges, opening an all-Black country club and starting a Black American newspaper. On 27th July 1963, Garrett Morgan died in Cleveland. His inventions saved countless lives and still inspire the inventors and engineers of today.



Think

How do you think Garrett Morgan felt having to hide the fact that he was the true inventor of his products?