

DEI IN MOTION

Celebrating Black American Inventors: Garrett A. Morgan

February 2026



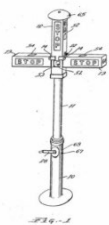
Black Americans have played crucial roles in revolutionizing the development and advancement of every single mode of transportation. One such invention, touching many modes of transportation at once, is the traffic signal – whether you are walking, driving, or biking, you are required to obey traffic signals.

Born in Paris, Kentucky around 1877, Garrett A. Morgan was not afforded many opportunities for a formal education. At the mere age of 14, he moved to Cincinnati on his own and used his meager wages to hire a tutor and continue his own education. At the turn of the 20th Century and during the Great Migration, Morgan moved to Cleveland where he was exposed to a bustling melting pot and a major manufacturing revolution. Morgan went from wage worker to inventor and entrepreneur in no time. In the 1920s, automobile travel was still relatively new and thus still a luxury not widely afforded to everyone. The streets were shared with cyclists, pedestrians, horse drawn carriages, streetcars, and all without much regulation, making them

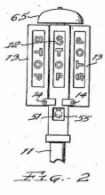
rather hazardous. On one fateful drive through town, Morgan witnessed a collision between a horse drawn carriage and a car which caused grave injuries to a young girl and required the horse to be euthanized. Ever the avid inventor, Morgan patented his improved traffic signal which had moveable arms that could be shifted to indicate whether traffic should stop or go in any given direction. It also included an intermediate step, which would stop traffic in all directions and clear the intersection. This simple idea would go on to become the yellow light we see in today’s traffic lights. After several public demonstrations and locally improved traffic flow, Morgan sold rights to his traffic signal to General Electric which spread it across America and eventually evolved into the modern traffic signal we use today.

It is important we take this special time to acknowledge the invaluable contributions of Black Americans, and it is even more important to continue embracing inclusivity as a keystone to our transportation narrative.

Nov. 20, 1923.



G. A. MORGAN
TRAFFIC SIGNAL



1,475,024

