

Black and Repressed, but With Free and Active Minds

DEBRA D. RICH'S 'BLACK INVENTORS WHO CHANGED HISTORY' IS A MUST-READ TESTAMENT TO LASTING ACCOMPLISHMENT

MILLIONS OF Africans were enslaved, tortured and forced to leave their homelands during the Middle Passage, which began during the 16th century. Upon arriving in the Americas, those who survived the unspeakable conditions of the voyages were sold as chattel.

Writes the author of "Black Inventors Who Changed History: 1800s-1900s," Debra D. Rich: "So many things were taken away, but the one thing they couldn't take away was their mind. ... Their minds were free ... free to envision a better life ahead."

The first African-American man to receive a patent was Thomas L. Jennings, in 1821. Born a free man in New York in 1791, he owned a tailoring and dry cleaning business. His invention was called "Dry Scouring."

Born a free man in Maryland in 1807, Henry Blair received two patents. One was in 1834 for a corn seed planter, the other in 1836 for a cotton seed planter.

Both inventions, according to Rich, "... made farming more productive. ... He didn't let his illiteracy be a hinderance (sic). On his patents, he signed his name with an X."

George Crum, born in 1822, was a head chef at a fancy restaurant in upstate New York. When a wealthy guest requested an alternative to thick French fries, he invented the potato chip—originally called the Saratoga Chip, after the name of the town in which it was invented.

Edmond Berger, born in Ghana, West Africa, invented the spark plug in 1839.

In 1878, 16-year-old Osbourn Dorsey from the District of Columbia area received a patent for the doorknob. Also in 1878, Joseph B. Winters invented the fire escape ladder in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania. The ladders were mounted to fire engines and raised to rescue residents from burning buildings, especially when maneuvering around the then-historically narrow streets made it difficult.

Judy W. Reed was the first African-American woman to receive a patent (in 1884) for the dough kneader and roller, which saved countless bakers from pain and cramped hands.

Like ice cream? Who doesn't? Alfred L. Cralle invented the ice cream scoop in 1897 in Pittsburgh,

after noticing how difficult it was to dispense ice cream with a spoon or ladle.

Many have heard of Madame C.J. Walker, who was born Sarah Breedlove in 1867. Rich says "She became one of the most successful black women in the United States," known for her creation and development of hair care and beauty products for African-American women. At one point she employed 40,000 African-American women and "became the first female self-made millionaire."

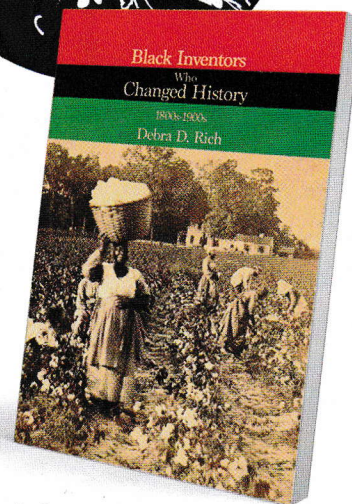
The author's words of strong encouragement and faith are interspersed throughout the many inventor stories:

- Defy the naysayers... There are no boundaries unless you create them yourself"
- It all starts with an idea. ... Dream big!"
- "The road to success usually involves a few setbacks and failures."
- "Failure means you're evolving into the person you're destined to become."

Rich adds: "It is very unfortunate that Black History is not taught in most schools. Black History is American History."

Hers is an essential book that will favorably challenge the young adults for whom it is geared—to be creative and to continue a rich legacy of inventions. Black inventor-related websites and links are included at the end of the book but in full length—which makes it difficult for the reader to copy, unless it's in e-book format. Otherwise, she should have provided shortened bitly.com or tinyurl.com links.

Full of related tidbits of history throughout, "Black Inventors Who Changed History: 1800s-1900s" should be required reading for all middle schools. It is highly recommended that perhaps in a second edition, the publisher should provide a crisper edit to avoid numerous typos and grammar issues. —*Edith G. Tolchin*



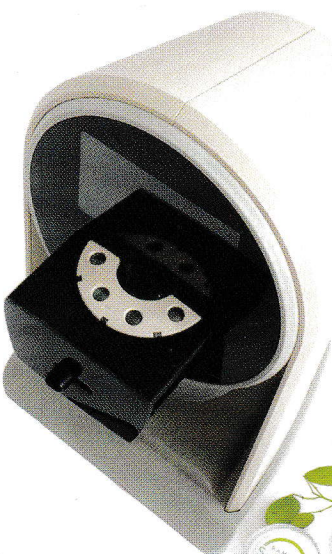
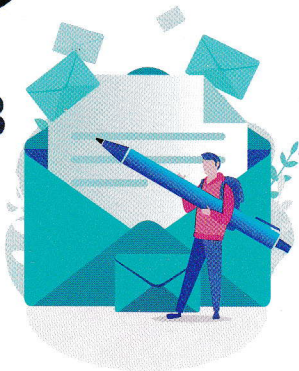
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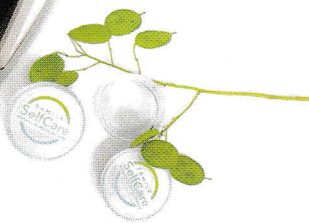


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Inventors

DIGEST

TIFFANY NORWOOD LIVES
'THE POWER OF WE'

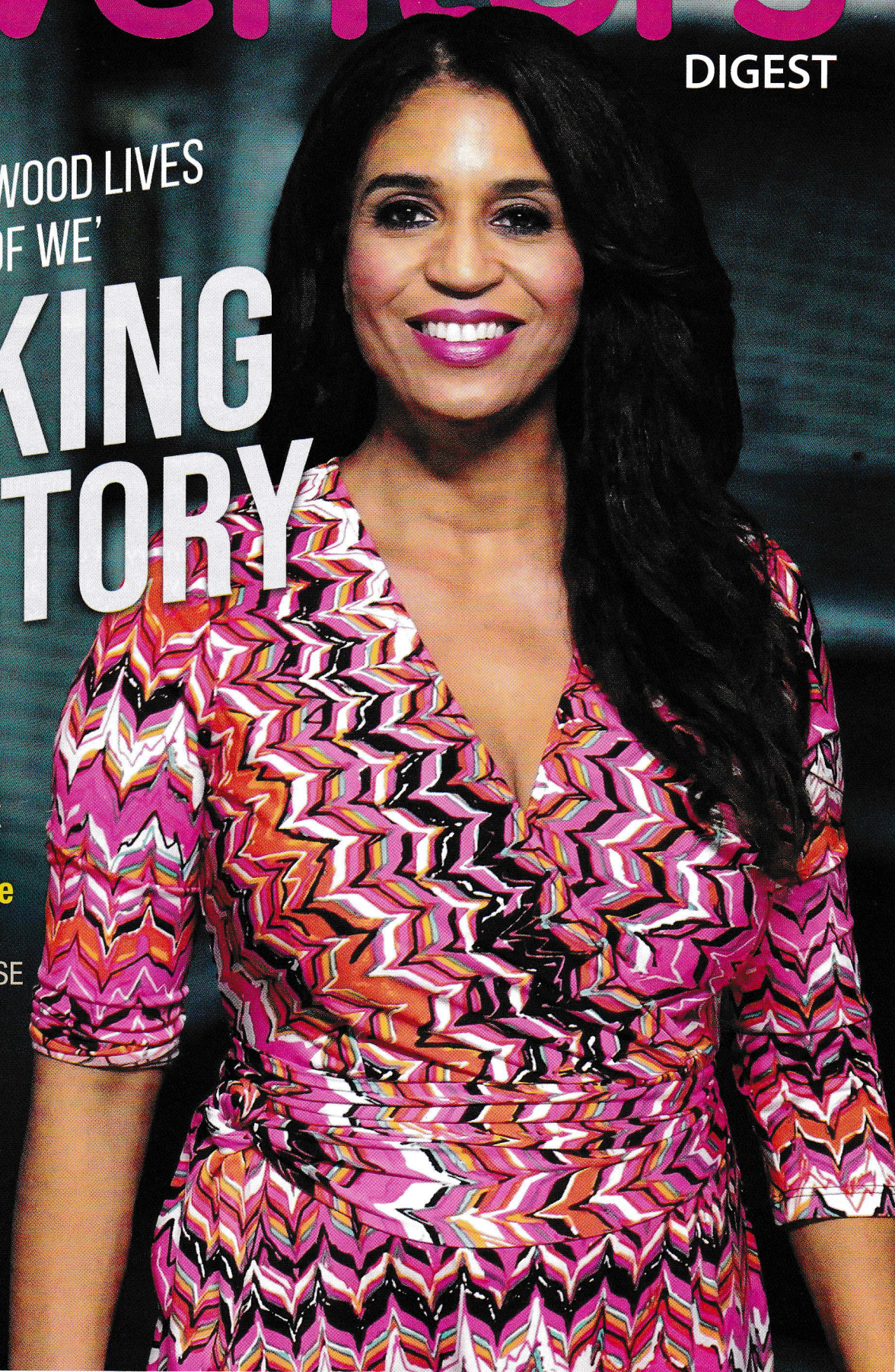
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