

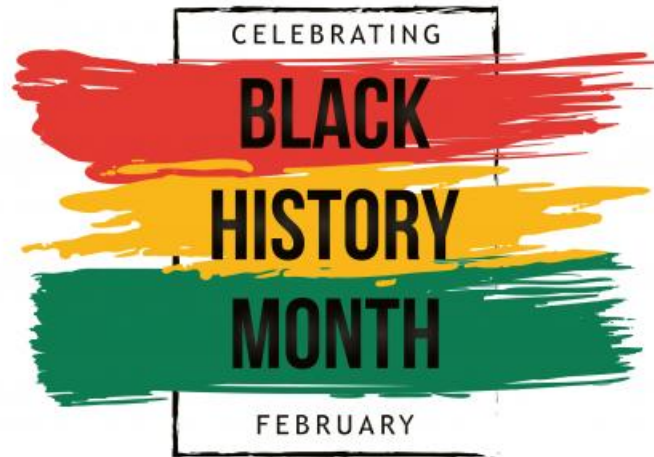
Black History Month: We can and must do better

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As we begin our annual celebration of Black History Month in the U.S., I — a Black woman working within corporate America — am both proud and disappointed. Proud of the many accomplishments of Black people, yet disappointed that 400 years after the first enslaved Africans were brought to this country, it is possible to still become the FIRST Black anything.



We, as a country, can and must do better. We, as individuals, can and must do better. And we, as corporate America, can and must do better. It's past time we held ourselves accountable.

We must do more than acknowledge Black people for simply being Black. We must acknowledge, respect, and honor Black people for their many invaluable contributions to innovation and transformation throughout history.

I dare you to imagine what our lives would be like without them. Consider this: These Black innovators have improved our quality of life and propelled industry forward, affecting countless facets of our lives. They include:

- Lewis Latimer invented a carbon filament to use in light bulbs in 1882
- Alexander Miles patented a mechanism to automate elevator doors in 1887
- Andrew Jackson Beard invented the Jenny Coupler, which greatly improved train car connections, patented in 1897

- George T. Sampson invented the clothes dryer in 1892
- Alice H. Parker patented the central gas heating furnace in 1919
- Three-light traffic light invented by Garrett Morgan in 1923
- Richard Spikes invented the automatic gear shift in 1932
- Frederick McKinley Jones patented a cooling system to be used in trucks allowing goods to be preserved during travel in 1940
- Home security system co-invented by Mary Van Brittan Brown in 1966
- Dr. Patricia E. Bath invented the laser that cures cataracts. It was patented in 1988
- Color IBM PC monitor and gigahertz chip co-invented by Mark Dean in 1980 and 1999

These are just a few examples of the intellectual, creative, scholarly contributions of Black people — contributions that have benefited the world for generations. It is baffling to me that in 2021 so few technical and leadership roles are held by Black people. Advancement requires opportunity.

Opportunity is the key to unlocking and promoting the talent that has and will continue to transform our world. What potential life-changing or industry advancing innovations have we missed out on due to lack of opportunity?

Leaders, let this be a call to action for you. Ensure that you are providing opportunities for talent to shine regardless of that talent's origins. Promote inclusion at your places of work, inviting new perspectives. Insist on diversity and challenge those who don't agree with the merits of its importance.

The 4th Industrial Revolution is here, and it behooves us to tap into ALL the talent available to lead us through this transformative time in history. Let us be the generation that celebrates the intellect and creativity of Black scholars and change makers and allows their talent to permeate all corners and levels of industry. Let us create a new history that future generations will study, one in which being the FIRST Black anything is a distant memory.

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