



Garrett Augustus Morgan (1877 – 1963) **Inventor, Businessman**

Major Achievement: Inventor of the three-position traffic signal, smoke hood (pre-cursor to gas mask)

Background: Morgan was born in Claysville, KY to parents who were both freed slaves. At age 14, he moved to Cincinnati, OH, where he worked as a handyman. He later learned sewing machine repair and opened his own sewing machine shop. Morgan then opened a women's clothing store where he both manufactured and sold women's clothes.

His first major invention was the smoke hood, which protected eyes from smoke and aided breathing. The device proved very effective in fighting fires. Morgan got a patent for the device in 1912 and started the National Safety Device Company to market and sell his invention. The smoke hood was well received by firefighters earning it a Gold Medal from the International Association of Fire Chiefs. At one point, it was estimated that nearly 500 cities were using this device. The smoke hood was also credited with saving the lives of several men trapped in a collapsed tunnel beneath Lake Erie. Morgan and his brother went to the accident site and personally led folks to safety. The accident was widely known as "The Lake Erie Crib Disaster". Unfortunately, Morgan's heroism was overlooked by authorities largely because he was African American.

Morgan invented a three-position traffic signal 1922 after observing an accident between a car and a horse-drawn carriage. He believed that collisions might be avoided if drivers had advanced notice of the need to stop. He modified the existing two-position signal by adding a third position to warn drivers of an upcoming stop. He obtained patents in the U.S., Britain, and Canada. He subsequently sold the patent to General Electric for \$40,000 (equivalent to \$609,000 today).

Morgan also made contributions to the area of black hair care by inventing several safe and effective products for straightening hair. Morgan Hair Refining Company was incredibly successful and was credited with funding the inventor's research activities during the rest of his life.

"Fun Fact" - As if his various invention-related activities were not enough, Morgan worked with social issues as well. He founded the Cleveland Association of Colored Men which became part of the NAACP, opened the first all-black country club, and launched the city's first African-American newspaper, "The Cleveland Call."

For more info, visit <https://www.thoughtco.com/garrett-morgan-profile-1992160> or your local library.