

Jamala Rogers
Opening Reflections at the St. Louis Board Of Alders
Friday, February 2, 2024

Thank you for the opportunity to open up Black History 2024 in the City of St. Louis.

Malcolm X reminded us that Black history did not begin in chains.

Africans are the original species dating back nearly 4 million years. Africa is the cradle of all civilization--gifting to the world mathematics, astronomy, medicine, architecture, philosophy, agriculture and so much more.

The expanse of that marvel is too much to squeeze into a few minutes because the unrestricted brilliance of my people has been difficult to document. Make no mistake, our contributions are indisputable and ubiquitous.

Today I want to focus on a sliver of that continuum. From about 1400 when Africans were brought to a continent already inhabited by Red Nations up to 1865 when the so-called EP ended chattel slavery, those 400 plus years are a blip in time. As a person of African descent in 2024, I am still genuinely astounded by our survival and the slow and tortuous metamorphosis back to humanity we once knew. This was a brutal and savage form of captivity and enslavement, where the most violent forms of dehumanization were enforced. The more our spirit and creativity were crushed, the more our genius was determined to rise and shine.

I am utterly fascinated by what Africans were able to produce during this period and are still contributing, in spite of the not-so hidden chains of racial oppression.

Black folks have always made life easier and enjoyable for everyone. Many of our inventions were stolen or lost, but hundreds more are incorporated into our daily lives. Inventions like the dustpan, gas mask, fire escape ladder, fountain pen, refrigerated truck, super soaker, home security system, automatic gear shift, folding chair, golf tee, lawn sprinkler, fire extinguisher, disposable syringe, blood bank, lawn mower, automatic elevator doors, ice cream scoop, radiation detector, shoe lasting machine, dry cleaning fluid, x-ray spectrometer, wrench, eggbeater and many more. I wonder if people would actually stop if they knew the electric stop light was invented by Garrett Morgan, a Black man, who wanted to save lives.

Black music is the soundtrack of America. Jive, gospel, bebop, boogie-woogie, ragtime, Jazz, doo-wop, disco, funk, go/go, soul, zydeco, hip hop, new jack swing, rock & roll, pop. Everyone wants the rhythm, but no one wants the blues. We taught the world to dance, and we can teach it so much more.

Black folks are the moral compass for this country, the fiercest defenders of the democracy. For those trying to erase our history, suppress our culture, deny our human rights, we are here to stay. For African People will survive in spite of all, for as long as the sun shines and the rivers flow. Ashe.