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**1st Place**

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**Age 12**

What contributions have people of African descent made to Western civilisation?

Introduction.

Civilisation is the refinement, education and enlightment of a society, be it scientific, political, cultural, legal or religious. So have people of African descent made contributions to western civilisation in the areas I mention here? Yes absolutely! For the purpose of this essay I am going to refer to people of African descent as black people. This refers to African, African Americans and Caribbean people.

In this essay I am going to tell you about the historical contributions black people have made towards western civilisation. I am going to tell you about black inventors and scientists, I am going to tell you about slavery and then about other contributions black people have made e.g. in the music industry.

Although most black people were denied a proper education, from as early as the 16th century there were a number of pioneering black scientists like Benjamin Banneker and George Washington Carver. Banneker taught himself mathematics and astronomy and later on published an almanac. Carver was a researcher and educator, he developed innovative agricultural methods. He also developed a lot of different uses for certain agricultural products such as the peanut.

Another great black scientist was Alexander Mills who invented the elevator. Without him there would be no cities or tall skyscrapers and great difficulty in reaching high floors.

Without the brilliant inventions of Richard Spikes and Joseph Gammel there probably would have been no cars because Richard Spikes invented the automatic gear shift, and Joseph Gammel the super charge system for internal combustion engines. To support his fellow black inventors Garret A. Morgan invented traffic signals. Without these inventors there would be very poor transport systems.

Writing is a very important aspect of modern day society, it is one of the best means of communication. John Love invented the pencil sharpener, William Purvis invented the fountain pen, Lee Burridge created the typewriting machine and W.A Lovette invented the modern printer. William Berry invented the post marking and cancelling machine. William Purvis also invented the hand stamp and Phillip Downing invented the letter drop. All these clever inventors were black people. Without most of these inventors we wouldn’t have stuff like magazines, newspapers and books.

John Smith invented the lawn sprinkler and John Burr added on to this invention by inventing the lawn mower. W. Steward invented the mop and Lloyd P. Ray the dustpan, these were invented so that we are able to clean up wet mess and brush up.Walter Summons invented the comb. George T. Samon invented the clothes dryer. Sarah Boone invented the ironing board, so that after clothes are dried they can be ironed, Jan E. Matzelinger invented the shoe lasting machine. All of these inventions link up because without them it all leads up to the same thing, poor hygiene. Without these inventions we would be very dirty as would our clothes, lawns, hair and our floors. And imagine living in a pig sty. I certainly couldn’t live without a comb because my hair is my pride and joy.

We all love our creature comforts and we do have a number of black greats who contributed to the comforts we enjoy today. Frederick Jones invented the air conditioner and Alice Parker the heating furnace. Lewis Latimer invented the electric lamp.

Michael Harvey invented the lantern and Granville T.Woods the auto cut off switch. These are similar because without heating or lights in your house just think of what life would be like at night! Especially in Britain where it can get icy cold, some people could even suffer from hypothermia if they didn’t have a fire place.

Imagine a hot summer day, as hot as Jamaica, you are hot and all you need is a ice cold drink. Well when you slowly sip that ice cold drink you have John Standard to thank, a black man who invented the refrigerator.

Charles Drew [1904-1950] was a world renowned surgeon and medical scientist from the USA. He invented a new method for storing blood, and set up the world’s first mass blood bank. The irony of all this is that Charles Drew died after being refused blood transfusion at his nearest hospital because he was black.

On top of all the scientific inventions that I have already mentioned black people have made very significant contributions to the Western way of life for example in the music industry. Without these contributions there would be no hip-hop, and I am glad that they have made that contribution because I like hip-hop so much that without it I would be bored stiff. From blues to jazz, gospel to do-wop, black people such as Ray Charles and Chuck Berry mainly found all rhythm rock and roll and funk and my favourite hip-hop

Other contributions that are important are from people like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr, Rosa Parks and Malcolm . I don’t think I would probably have all these luxuries I have because they fought for black civil rights.

On December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat to a white passenger on a racially segregated bus in Montgomery Alabama. Even though she was arrested and fined, her actions led to the mass boycott of buses by African Americans. In 1956 December 20 the Supreme Court ruled that the segregation of Montgomery buses was illegal and therefore they were officially desegregated. Rosa Parks is known as the woman who single handedly spear-headed the civil rights movement in America. Although racism and segregation was and still is a very painful experience for black people, their fight for justice has enlightened the world about black people, that they are equal and deserve a proper education and have their rights. Many famous black people like Nelson Mandela have shown the world humility, tenacity and great statesmanship as shown in one of his famous quotes “During my lifetime I have dedicated myself to this struggle of African people……….. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and achieve but if it needs be it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die”

Slavery has played a enormous and extraordinary part in contributing to the wealth of the western world. Slaves were taken by force from Africa, and brutally forced to work in plantations of the United states of America, U.K and Europe. This event is painfully illustrated in the movie ROOTS. The Roman Empire wouldn’t exist if it wasn’t for the backbone of slaves. For me this is not only a contribution to the western world but a gigantic sacrifice.

Conclusion

As stated above you can see that black people have made an enormous contribution to the western world. People like Rosa Parks and Nelson Mandela endangered their own lives in their fight for justice. People like Alexander Mills elevated the black race with their scientific inventions. Without black musicians like Chuck Berry music wouldn’t be what it is today.

I am proud to be black and to know my history, my background and my culture.