

African American Inventors

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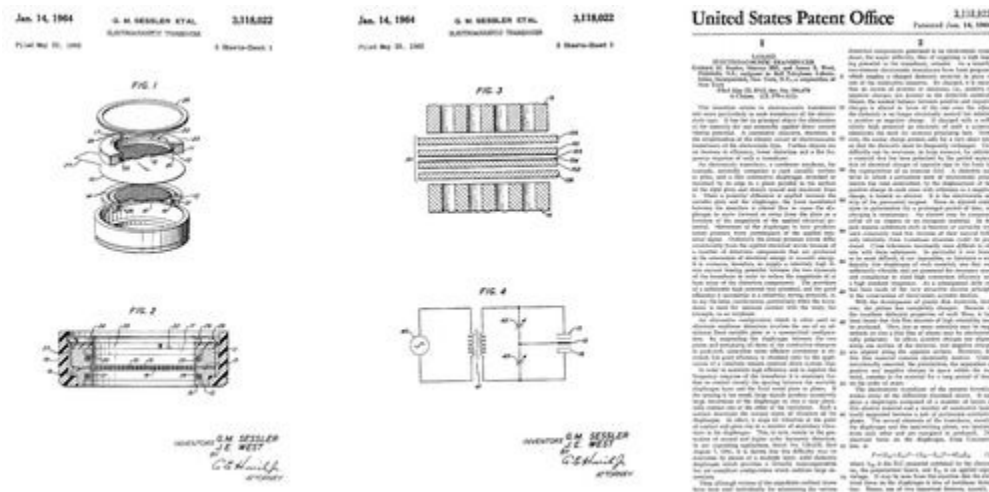
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James West

by ReadWorks



patent for first foil electret microphone

Microphones can be found in lots of places today. They are used at concerts. They are used in recorders. They are used in some computers. And, of course, they are used in phones!

Almost all microphones today use the same kind of technology. That technology was invented by a man named James West. If you have ever spoken on a phone, you have used James's invention!

James West is a scientist. He has invented many things related to microphones. In the 1960s, James made a very small, strong microphone. He invented special technology to make his small microphone work. That's the technology that can be found in almost all microphones today!

James's work hasn't just been about microphones, though. He has also worked to get more women and people of color to study science and engineering. Today, he works as a researcher and professor.

George Washington Carver



Photo of George Washington Carver

You may already know that peanuts are used in lots of foods. But that's not all peanuts can be used for. One man invented over 100 products using the peanut! He was called "the Peanut Man". His name was George Washington Carver.

George Washington Carver was born as a slave in Missouri. But slavery ended soon after he was born. So George was able to get an education as he grew up. When he went to college, he was the first black student there! George studied plants in college and afterwards. Then, he became a

teacher and researcher at an African American university. There, he made important discoveries about peanuts and other crops.

One thing George invented was a way to farm called crop rotation. He found that if farmers planted and grew cotton one year, then peanuts the next year, the soil in the farm would stay healthy. This would help all crops grow! George also invented many ways to use the peanut. He found a way to use them to make plastic. He used them to make paints. He even used them to make gasoline!

Today, George Washington Carver is famous for his work in science. His work helped lots of people.

Patricia Bath

by ReadWorks



National Institute of Medicine

Photo of Patricia Bath

Vision is one of your five senses. It is an important way you take in information about the world around you. But as people get older, they can sometimes start to lose their eyesight. One thing that can cause this is a cataract. A cataract is when part of a person's eye that is supposed to be clear gets cloudy. This makes it harder for the person to see well.

One important inventor created a tool that helps get rid of people's cataracts. Her name is Patricia Bath.

Patricia is an eye doctor. She has spent a lot of time studying eyesight in different people. As a doctor, she found that some people were more likely than others to have eye problems. For example, she found that African Americans were more likely to become blind than other patients. Patricia thought it was important to help treat people's eye problems. She thought everyone had a right to sight.

In the 1980s, she invented the tool that helps get rid of people's cataracts. It used a laser. Before her invention, getting rid of a cataract was tough. It did not always have good end results. And it could be painful for the patient. But Patricia's tool was better. It was more accurate because of the laser. And it was more comfortable for the patient!

Thanks to Patricia's invention, many people have gotten their eyesight back!

The Telephone, the Lightbulb, and Lewis Latimer

by ReadWorks



Lewis Latimer

You may know about how the telephone and the lightbulb were invented. Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone. Thomas Edison is the man behind the lightbulb. But did you know that one person worked closely with both of them on these inventions?

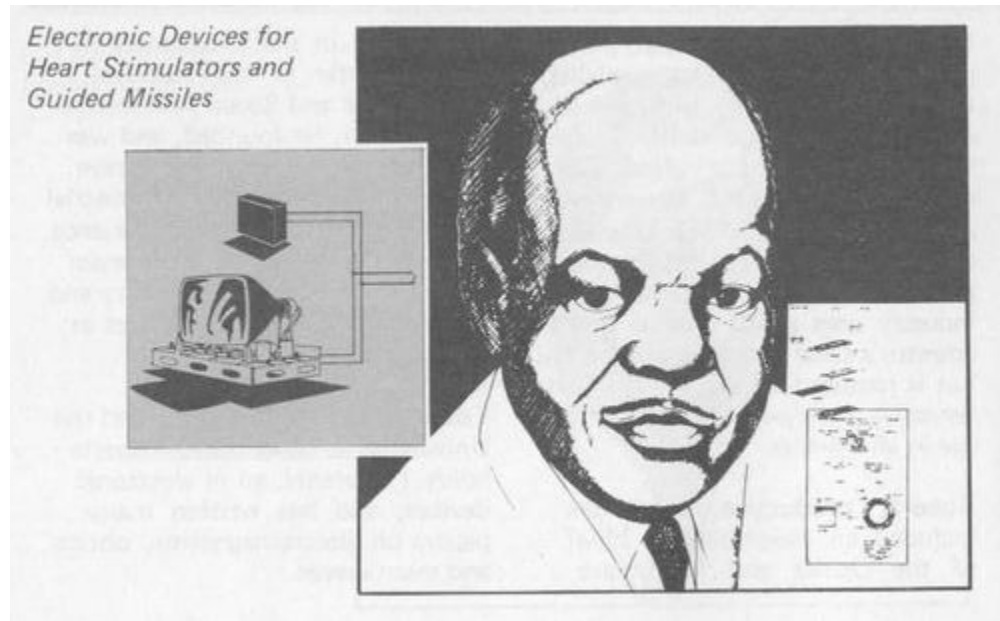
That person was Lewis Latimer. Lewis was a draftsman. That means he drew very technical, detailed plans for machines. He worked closely with Alexander Graham Bell to draw the plans for the telephone. With these

plans, he helped Bell get a patent for his invention. Getting a patent for his invention meant Bell was the only one who could make or sell it. This was very important for Alexander! Lewis also worked with Thomas Edison. He helped Thomas get patents for his lighting inventions, too.

But Lewis did not just help other inventors get patents. He was an inventor too! One important thing he invented was an improved lightbulb. The lightbulb Edison made did not always last very long. But Lewis made a small change to it. That small change made it last much longer. Because of this improvement, electric lighting could be set up in homes and on streets.

Otis Boykin and the Resistor

by ReadWorks



U.S. Department of Energy

Ink drawing of Otis Boykin

Electricity makes many things in our lives work. It's what makes lightbulbs turn on. It gives computers and TVs power. It even makes important medical machines work.

Many things that run on electricity have a part called a resistor. This is a device that helps control the flow of electricity in a machine. It helps make sure the machine is safe to use.

Different versions of this device have been around for a while. But a man named Otis Boykin made resistors that were much better than the ones that came before. Otis was an African American inventor. He made a kind of resistor that let only a certain amount of electricity flow. This was an important improvement over other resistors. Two years later, Otis made an even better resistor. This one could handle big changes in temperature and pressure. It was also cheap to make.

Otis's resistors were used in many things. They were used in televisions and computers. They were even used in army weapons. But one of the most important things they were part of was a machine called a pacemaker. This machine is important for the health of people with heart problems. It helps people's hearts beat normally. Thanks to Otis and his resistors, thousands of men and women have had longer lives.

Garrett Morgan



Garrett Morgan was a very successful African American inventor. Inventors are often known for one important thing they created. But Garrett invented many things!

One of Garrett's most important inventions was called a safety hood. People could wear it to breathe safely when there was smoke, gas, or other unsafe things in the air. Garrett once used his invention to save people. Workers were digging a tunnel under a lake when there was an explosion. The workers became trapped. They were stuck in a place with dangerous gases

and lots of dust. Garrett and his brother put on safety hoods and went to the tunnel to help. They helped save two lives!

Another important thing Garrett invented was a traffic signal. Today, there are traffic signals in many places where two streets cross each other. These help people know when it's safe to cross a street. But these did not exist in Garrett's time. After seeing an accident at an intersection, Garrett decided to change that. He made a traffic signal with a warning light. The light showed drivers when they would need to stop.

Both of these important inventions have saved many lives over the years. So Garrett Morgan was more than an inventor. He was a hero!