**Bessie Blount  
Devices for the disabled**

**Bessie Virginia Blount** was a physical therapist, inventor, and forensic scientist also known by her married name, Bessie Blount Griffin. Born in Virginia, Bessie studied nursing at the Community Kennedy Memorial Hospital in Newark, New Jersey, and at the Panzer College of Physical Education and Hygiene in East Orange, New Jersey. She also studied physical therapy in Chicago.

After World War II, Bessie worked with soldiers who were amputees; that is, people who had lost arms or legs. She invented a device to help these handicapped soldiers eat, if they had no arms. This electric self-feeding device delivered food through a tube, one bite at a time, to a mouthpiece that could be used whether the patient was sitting up or lying down. When the person wanted more food, he just bit down on the tube and it signaled a machine to send the next morsel.

In 1951 Bessie patented a portable receptacle support. This device allowed people to feed themselves by using a brace around the neck that held a bowl, cup, or dish. She also appeared on the Philadelphia television show “The Big Idea” in 1953, becoming the first African-American and the first woman on the show.