



# **The African-American Heart Surgery Pioneer: The Genius of Vivien Thomas (Genius Inventors and Their Great Ideas)**

*Edwin Brit Wyckoff*

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Vivien Theodore Thomas was an African-American surgical technician who developed the procedures used to treat blue baby syndrome in the 1940s. He was an assistant to surgeon Alfred Blalock in Blalock's experimental animal laboratory at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee and later at the Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland. Without any education past high school, Thomas rose above poverty and racism to become a cardiac surgery pioneer and a teacher of operative techniques to many of the country's most prominent surgeons. Vivien Thomas was the first African American without a doctorate to perform open heart surgery on a white patient in the United States.

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