



Mary Jackson

Mathematician / Aerospace Engineer

1921-2005

Mary Jackson was an African-American mathematician and aerospace engineer who worked for NASA during their mission to put the first American into space, mainly studying aerodynamics and analyzing data from wind tunnel and aircraft flight experiments.

Born in 1921, Jackson earned her bachelor's degree from the Hampton Institute in 1942 before becoming a math teacher and tutor, then a bookkeeper, then a clerk. She spent most of her NASA career in Hampton, Virginia at the Langley Research Center, having started in 1951 as a 'computer' in the West Computing Division, which was racially segregated. In 1953 she had to petition the city of Hampton to let her take graduate level math/physics courses held in an all-white high school in order to be promoted to an engineer. In 1958 she became NASA's first black female engineer, and later became a manager of NASA's Affirmative Action Program and its Federal Women's Program. After 34 years she attained the highest title in the engineering department, and was the inspiration behind one of the main protagonists of the 2017 movie 'Hidden Figures'.