

# Hidden Figures Black History Month



**Hidden figures Black History Month** celebrates the remarkable contributions of African Americans who have been overlooked or marginalized in the historical narrative. The term "hidden figures" has gained particular prominence in recent years, especially after the release of the 2016 film "Hidden Figures," which chronicles the lives of three African American women mathematicians at NASA. This article will delve into the significance of these hidden figures during Black History Month, highlighting the stories of these women, the broader context of African American contributions to science and engineering, and the importance of recognizing and honoring these figures in our history.

## Understanding the Concept of "Hidden Figures"

The phrase "hidden figures" refers to individuals whose contributions have been instrumental in significant advancements but have not received the recognition they deserve. In the context of Black History Month, it emphasizes the historical context of African Americans in various fields, particularly in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics).

## The Impact of the Movie "Hidden Figures"

The film "Hidden Figures" brought to light the incredible stories of Katherine Johnson, Dorothy Vaughan, and Mary Jackson. These women played crucial roles in NASA's early space missions during the Civil Rights Movement, yet their contributions remained largely unrecognized until recent years. The movie has sparked interest in the lives of these women and the broader narrative of African Americans in STEM.

1. Katherine Johnson: A brilliant mathematician whose calculations were essential to the success of the first American in space and the first human to orbit the Earth.
2. Dorothy Vaughan: A pioneer in computer programming who transitioned NASA's calculations from human computers to electronic computing.

3. Mary Jackson: The first African American female engineer at NASA, who fought for gender and racial equality within the agency.

The film not only highlighted these women's professional achievements but also showcased their personal struggles against systemic racism and sexism.

## The Broader Context of African American Contributions

While "Hidden Figures" focuses on three women, countless others have contributed to various fields throughout history. Recognizing these figures during Black History Month is crucial for understanding the full scope of African American achievements.

### Key Areas of Contribution

African Americans have made significant strides in numerous disciplines. Here are some key areas where their contributions have been particularly impactful:

#### 1. Science:

- George Washington Carver: Known for his work in agricultural science, Carver developed techniques to improve soils depleted by repeated plantings of cotton.
- Alice Ball: The first woman and first African American to earn a degree from the University of Hawaii, she developed the "Ball Method," a treatment for leprosy that saved countless lives.

#### 2. Technology:

- Marie Van Brittan Brown: Invented the first home security system in the 1960s, which laid the groundwork for modern surveillance systems.
- Mark Dean: A computer engineer and one of the co-inventors of the IBM personal computer, Dean holds three of the company's original nine patents.

#### 3. Mathematics:

- Benjamin Banneker: A self-taught mathematician and astronomer, Banneker is known for his work in surveying and his almanacs, which predicted solar and lunar eclipses.
- Euphemia Haynes: The first African American woman to earn a Ph.D. in mathematics, she significantly contributed to education and advocating for minority students.

#### 4. Engineering:

- Elijah McCoy: An inventor and engineer known for his contributions to lubrication systems for steam engines, which significantly improved efficiency and performance.
- Lonnie Johnson: An engineer and inventor, Johnson is best known for inventing the Super Soaker water gun and has worked on numerous projects at NASA.

## The Importance of Recognition

Recognizing the contributions of hidden figures during Black History Month serves several important purposes:

## **1. Education and Awareness**

Highlighting these stories educates the public about the rich history of African Americans in various fields. It challenges the prevailing narratives that often overlook their contributions and encourages a more inclusive understanding of history.

## **2. Inspiration for Future Generations**

When young people see role models who look like them succeeding in fields traditionally dominated by others, it inspires them to pursue similar paths. Representation matters, and acknowledging hidden figures during Black History Month can motivate future scientists, engineers, and mathematicians.

## **3. Challenging Systemic Racism**

Recognizing these contributions also serves to challenge systemic racism and the barriers faced by African Americans throughout history. It brings to light the inequities that have persisted and emphasizes the need for continued efforts toward equality and justice.

# **Ways to Celebrate Hidden Figures During Black History Month**

Celebrating hidden figures during Black History Month can be done in various ways, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of their contributions:

## **1. Educational Programs and Workshops**

Schools, libraries, and community centers can organize programs that focus on the contributions of African Americans in STEM and other fields. Workshops that engage participants in hands-on activities, such as coding or math challenges, can empower young people to pursue careers in these areas.

## **2. Film Screenings and Discussions**

Hosting screenings of "Hidden Figures" and other relevant films can spark important conversations about race, gender, and the impact of systemic barriers. Follow-up discussions can help participants reflect on the material and its relevance today.

### **3. Exhibitions and Displays**

Museums and cultural institutions can create exhibitions highlighting the contributions of hidden figures. These displays can include interactive elements that allow visitors to engage with the stories of these individuals.

### **4. Social Media Campaigns**

Utilizing social media platforms to share the stories of hidden figures can reach a broader audience. Creating hashtags, infographics, and short videos can engage younger generations and promote awareness.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, "hidden figures" encapsulates the untold stories of African Americans who have made significant contributions to history, particularly in STEM fields. As we celebrate Black History Month, it is essential to recognize these individuals, not only to honor their legacy but also to inspire future generations. Through education, awareness, and recognition, we can ensure that these hidden figures are no longer overlooked but celebrated for their invaluable contributions to society. The journey toward equality and recognition continues, and acknowledging these figures is a vital part of that process.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What is the significance of the movie 'Hidden Figures' in relation to Black History Month?**

'Hidden Figures' highlights the contributions of African American women mathematicians at NASA during the Space Race, showcasing their vital roles in history and promoting discussions about racial and gender equality during Black History Month.

### **Who are the three main figures depicted in 'Hidden Figures'?**

The three main figures are Katherine Johnson, Dorothy Vaughan, and Mary Jackson, who broke barriers at NASA and contributed significantly to the success of early space missions.

### **How did 'Hidden Figures' impact public awareness of African American contributions to STEM fields?**

The film raised awareness about the often-overlooked contributions of African Americans in STEM, inspiring a renewed interest in diversity within these fields and encouraging young people from underrepresented backgrounds to pursue careers in science and technology.

# What themes related to Black History Month are explored in 'Hidden Figures'?

'Hidden Figures' explores themes of resilience, perseverance, and the struggle for equality, emphasizing the importance of recognizing and celebrating the achievements of marginalized groups in history.

## How can educators use 'Hidden Figures' to enhance discussions during Black History Month?

Educators can use 'Hidden Figures' as a teaching tool to discuss the intersection of race, gender, and science, fostering critical thinking about social justice issues and inspiring students to learn about other significant figures in Black history.

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