

## PROFILE OF RESISTANCE

### KATHERINE GOBLE JOHNSON

*mathematician, activist*

*"I don't have a feeling of inferiority. Never had. I'm as good as anybody, but no better."*

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#### Background Information

Born: August 26, 1918; Died: February 24, 2020

Johnson's father moved to Institute, West Virginia so that she and her siblings could attend school past eighth grade. Since her father loved math, he motivated Johnson to excel in school and inspired her own love of math. Johnson received a Bachelor's of Science in Mathematics and French from West Virginia State College in 1937. After graduation, she taught at an all-Black school in Virginia. She took a break from teaching to start a family. When she heard about job openings at the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics (NACA), which later became NASA, she and her family moved to Newport News, and she began working there in 1953<sup>1</sup>.

#### Person's Resistance

She was one of the few women working at the organization, and one of the even fewer Black women. Coming to work every day was a fight against segregation to prove that she was just as capable as any of the white men. The simple things that we would never consider were struggles that she had to deal with every day. People did not take her seriously, she worked longer hours, and had to work twice as hard as everyone else.

Johnson was an essential contributor to our achievements in space. She provided math for the 1958 document Notes on Space Technology. In 1960, Johnson coauthored a report that described an orbital spaceflight landing, and was the first woman to receive credit as an author of a research report. Johnson was a crucial member of the team that programmed the orbital mission of John Glenn in 1962. She had gained a significant amount of trust for her math skills.

#### Achievements

In 2015, President Obama awarded her the Presidential Medal of Freedom<sup>2</sup>. Johnson stands as an example of resistance due to her work against gendered, racial norms that often stand in the STEM field.

<sup>1</sup> Loff, S. (2016, November 22). Katherine Johnson Biography. Retrieved from <https://www.nasa.gov/content/katherine-johnson-biography>.

<sup>2</sup> Smither, W. (2019, August 29). Katherine Goble Johnson (1918-). BlackPast. Retrieved from <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/johnson-katherine-g-1918/>.

