



Mary Jackson (1921 - 2005)

Mary Jackson was an American mathematician and aerospace engineer who became NASA's first black female engineer.

Mary was born and raised in Hampton, Virginia. After graduating from high school she earned a dual degree in mathematics and physical science at the Hampton Institute (now Hampton University). She worked as a math teacher in Maryland for a year before returning to Hampton.

In 1951, Jackson was recruited by the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics (NACA), which later became NASA. She started as a research mathematician, or computer, in the segregated West Area Computing Section

In 1953 Jackson left the West Computers to work for engineer Kazimierz Czarnecki, conducting experiments in a high-speed wind tunnel. He suggested that Jackson enter a training program that would allow her to become an engineer. Since Virginia's schools were still segregated, she had to obtain special permission to take classes with white students. Jackson ultimately completed the necessary courses, and in 1958 she became the first black female engineer at NASA.

Despite early promotions, she was denied management-level positions, and in 1979 she left engineering and took a demotion to become manager of the women's program at NASA. In that post, she sought to improve the opportunities for all women at the organization. She retired in 1985.

The 2016 film, *Hidden Figures*, recounts the career of Jackson along with: Katherine Johnson, and Dorothy Vaughan.

Source: Encyclopedia Britannica

