

11/20/2020

To: Commission for Historical Statues in the
United States Capitol

I enthusiastically nominate Creola Katherine Coleman Johnson to replace the Lee statue in the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C. If selected to represent the Commonwealth of Virginia in the United States Capitol, Creola Katherine Coleman Johnson would be the first and only African American woman to grace that site.

Katherine Johnson was and continues to be associated with significant events that continue to change the course of modern history, race relations, and space exploration. She demonstrated exceptional intellectual thought while exemplifying patriotism, courage, perseverance, assertiveness, and forward-thinking into today and even into the coming future. Without Johnson we might not have the coming Artemis Project, the International Space Station, travel to Mars, private investment and cooperation between NASA and private companies like SpaceX, or a bright future in STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) for all individuals. Katherine Johnson was a true pioneer who broke many barriers while maintaining her positivity, self-confidence, and humility. Despite her phenomenal achievements, Johnson expressed her belief that she was "as good as anybody, but no better." She said, "I don't have

a feeling of inferiority."

We could all take lessons from Johnson regarding ambition, commitment, attitude, family, and education. She refused to play the blame game and never saw herself as a victim. Johnson and her family understood the value of a strong work ethic and education which included today's STEM. As a mathematician, engineer, and "human computer", she sustained her high standards for 33 years of extraordinary accomplishments at Langley and with NASA. She championed girls, women, people of color, and STEM and is a bridge from the past to the future. Katherine Johnson made not just a single contribution, but a life time and beyond.

Upon her death from natural causes in Newport News, Virginia at 101 the exceptional Katherine Johnson had amassed a multitude of accomplishments, many of which were firsts, and received numerous awards and recognitions for her personal achievements and her professional endeavors. Among Johnson's many honors are the Katherine G. Johnson Computational Research Facility at Langley Research Center, the Silver Snoopy award from NASA for "outstanding contributions to flight safety and mission success", the Presidential Medal of Freedom given by President Barack Obama citing her "as a pioneering example of African American women in STEM", an honorary

doctorate from the College of William and Mary, and in 2020 the new Katherine G. Johnson Elementary School named to honor her. In addition, a book and a film called Hidden Figures were released in 2016

The respect and admiration that Johnson earned from a diverse group of individuals is evident by comments such as:

President Barack Obama -

"Katherine Johnson refused to be limited by society's expectations of her gender and race, while expanding the boundaries of humanity's reach."

NASA Administrator, James Bridenstine -

"She was an American hero and her pioneering legacy will never be forgotten." / "... will never forget Katherine Johnson's courage and the milestones we could not have reached without her. Her story and her grace continue to inspire the world."

Margot Lee Shetterly, author, Hidden Figures

"The wonderful gift that Katherine Johnson gave us is that her story shined a light on the stories of so many other people. She gave us a new way to look at black history, women's history, and American history."

In her town there was no school for blacks past grade eight. Therefore, her father drove her and her siblings to West Virginia State College

to complete high school and college. After graduating from high school at age 14, Johnson enrolled in West Virginia State College where she earned two degrees, one in French and another in mathematics. In addition, Katherine graduated *summa cum laude* at age 18.

After graduation from college, Johnson taught in black public schools, married, and began a family. With her enrollment in West Virginia University's graduate math program, she became one of three African American students and the only black woman selected to integrate the graduate school after the 1938 Supreme Court ruling regarding public higher education.

Her career choice as a research mathematician would not be easy because she was both a woman and African American. In 1953 with her hiring at what was then an all black West Area Computing Unit at Langley Memorial Aeronautical Laboratory in Hampton, Virginia where NACA (National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics) was housed, her skills would be utilized and eventually greatly appreciated. In 1958 NACA became NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration). Johnson would be instrumental when the United States entered the space race after the Soviet satellite Sputnik was successfully launched in 1957. While at NASA, Katherine Johnson netted another first. She was the first woman in her division to be

allowed to receive credit for and to put her name on a research paper or report.

Katherine Johnson was an essential element in Project Mercury's successful launch of America's human space program. Johnson computed all of the rocket trajectories. In 1961 Johnson continued her brilliant work in Alan Shepard's Freedom 7 mission which was the first to carry an American into space. She followed in 1962 by manually verifying computer calculations for John Glenn's orbit around the Earth because Glenn trusted Johnson's work over computers. In 1969 Johnson helped with trajectory calculations for the flight of Apollo 11 to the moon. When the Apollo 13 mission had to be aborted in 1970, Johnson was instrumental in plotting a safe path home for the crew. As a hero in the American space race, before her retirement in 1986, she also worked with the space shuttle program, Earth Resources Technology Satellite (Landsat), and plans for missions to Mars.

submitted by:

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