

KATHERINE JOHNSON

Occupation
Mathematician

Nationality
American

Famous Quote
“Like what you do, and then you will do your best.”

Katherine Johnson was an American mathematician for NASA, born in 1918. She was the first woman to attend important meetings and briefings in the institution and was most well known for calculating the trajectories of U.S. crewed space flights.

‘COMPUTERS WHO WORE SKIRTS’

In 1953, Johnson began working as a ‘Computer’ for NACA (soon to be known as NASA). The ‘Computers who wore skirts’ were a pool of women who performed mathematical calculations, before computers were available.

BIRTH

Katherine Johnson was born in 1918, in White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia.

EARLY LIFE

Johnson’s skill with numbers was clear from an early age, so at age 10 she was enrolled in high school in Institute, West Virginia. Katherine Johnson lived in the area until she graduated with degrees in Maths and French.

“You tell me when you want it and where you want it to land, and I’ll do it backwards and tell you when to take off”

PROJECT MERCURY

Johnson was moved to ‘Project Mercury’, a NASA team planning the flight path of John Glenn, the first American to orbit the Earth. Glenn refused to fly until Johnson checked over the computer’s calculations.

AEROSPACE TECHNOLOGIST

Katherine Johnson moved to the Spacecraft Controls Branch of NASA, where she provided calculations for the Apollo 11 and Apollo 13 moon missions. She later worked on the Space Shuttle Program.

LEGACY

Since her retirement in 1986, Johnson has been awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom and a Congressional Gold Medal. She is considered to be a pioneer of African-American women in STEM.



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