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## Over the Moon

My shirt soaking wet, I thought no sun could dry my sweat. I was very tired, tired of trying and trying so hard to prove myself capable. It wasn't long ago. I was in grade 6 when my teacher expressed his sexist shock after I solved a very hard math question on the board. I am not a genius, but I see a hidden figure of Katherine Johnson in me, and I in her. Under the mindset that no girl could be good at math, I was caged. In the 1960s, the cage was different; it was an intersection of gender and color. As the book *Hidden Figures* depicts, women, especially Black women in the United States of America, didn't have as many job opportunities, or at least academic opportunities, as White women did. The only thing they had in common was 'being women'. The irony of being so smart but remain ignorant of what 'races' are couldn't go unnoticed about the genius scientists at National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics (NACA) and National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), for somehow, they believed that the color and gender of a U.S. citizen had something to do with their intellectual abilities. From such an enduring mistake, the scientific history was marked with loopholes until the story of Dorothy Vaughn, Katherine Coleman Goble Johnson, and Mary Jackson filled them.

As soon as the United States got its hands on its space exploration achievements, presidents like John F. Kennedy were credited and many other scientists were acknowledged, but the three women who made all that happen were left hidden, hidden behind doors shut in their faces every time they tried so hard to make a forward move. This says a lot about the history we learn today. In her book, *Hidden Figures*, Margot Lee Shetterly starts with a list of many women she learned about who have contributed a lot to NACA and NASA's feats, and she mentions that the list goes on and on. I wonder how many more stories we could have read if all those women had been fully accredited for their work and contribution. *Hidden Figures*, though a story about mainly three women, is the voice of all the unfigured women's names, those whose work determined U.S.' today's success, and the White women who still couldn't have female representatives in the science field. It is a story for every woman, irrespective of age and the period, who has ever been undermined based on her skin color or gender or both, traits no one ever chooses to possess or has the power to change.

From the deep description of Katherine Johnson's childhood to the detailed journey of Dorothy Vaughn, *Hidden Figures* tells well the story of the three female Mathematicians. It is a thorough portrayal of what the scientific American life looked like at the time, the 1960s. For women who were unheard of, their story is brought to life through all the details. Their story is told in such a way that one feels present with them: under the same weather, bearing the same worries, and holding onto the same hope. It is their story's narration that takes all the readers to the 1960s and moves them through the three women's life journeys. Today, Americans who read *Hidden Figures* understand well how segregation was affiliated with NASA at the time. They comprehend well a world they never lived in, and that helps them understand the world they are living in today, for it is by *Hidden Figures* that the American readers explore what it meant to be a colored woman or just a woman in 1960, and how that translates into the sacrifices made by all the women, like Mary Jackson, who did all they could for American Black women to be enjoying quality education in non-segregated institutions today, those like Dorothy Vaughn

whose solidarity raised American women altogether instead of selfishly moving forward one by one, and women like Katherine whose persistence has altered the fixed mindset of gender bias in the science field into free exploration of fields 'for all' that every American enjoys today.

To navigate through life, Dorothy, Katherine, and Mary had certain values that abetted them to succeed. Truth is: life never stops being challenging for any generation. The problems Americans face nowadays are different from the setbacks the three female Mathematicians had to overcome, but in their different forms, challenges will always be there. The American society, the Black community or otherwise, should learn many lessons from the three women's deeds. Now that their story has been told, it is time that Americans learn from it. The goals might be different from 'landing a man on the moon', but learning that segregation almost took that dream away from the U.S. should be a lesson to any American reader with doubts about the fruits of a non-segregated world. Besides, *Hidden Figures* disclosed what the truth is in the American scientific history, and it should be embraced, for it is the basis of Americans' interpretation of the past concerning what they aspire for their future and America's.

As a non-American reader, who is an African woman though, I still couldn't hold back tears that threatened to escape my eyes when reading *Hidden Figures*. I strongly resonated with the characters' feelings that it took me back to my time. I remembered: I didn't stop after solving one hard math question; I solved many more. I quit feeling threatened by my brother's excellence and fought for mine. It was neither a competition nor a race, for I had had my abilities all along. Ripping off the doubts that society covered me with, I wore strength: persistence, patience, and passion. It was on February 2, 2018 that I was summoned for a Newspaper interview as the Best Performer in Mathematics and Best Female performer in Sciences in the Rwandan National Examination. I hadn't landed a man on the moon, but I surely felt *over the moon*.