



Emanuel School

# BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Monday 3rd - Friday 28th October

## TUESDAY



### Ernest Everett Just (1883 – 1941)

Hector Harper - Lower Sixth

Ernest Everett Just was an African American biologist, specialising in marine biology, cytology (study of cells) and parthenogenesis (study of a specific type of asexual reproduction). One of his key innovations was the study of cells under their regular environmental conditions in contrast to opening them up in a laboratory.

Just and his brother and sister were born and raised in South Carolina by his single mother. His mother, Mary Matthews, having noticed an abundance of empty land, persuaded several black families to move to a farm which eventually became a town. Until the age of 13 Just remained here, until he went to the South Carolina State University, and then at the age of 16 to the Meriden in New Hampshire.

Despite suffering from the death of his mother, Just completed the four year course in only three years, going on to graduate as *magna cum laude* from Dartmouth College. Having studied there, he had developed an interest in the study of biology, more specifically the ideas of fertilisation and egg development.

After graduating, Just struggled with the racism of the early 1900s and struggled massively trying to get a job of teaching at primarily white colleges or universities. This forced him into taking the only

option he could of teaching English at Howard University in Washington. By 1909 he was simultaneously teaching Biology as well as English, and in 1910 he was placed at the helm of the Howard University Biology department. From here, in 1912, he was appointed the head of the Zoology department up until his death in 1941.

During his time at Howard University, he met with one Frank R. Lille, where he was invited to spend a summer at the Marine Biological Laboratory; he became an expert on marine eggs and after a short period of time his skill was highly sought after. With his unique expertise, he took a temporary leave of absence from Howard University to enrol in an advanced academic program at the University of Chicago where he became the first recipient of the Spingarn Medal, an award dedicated "for an outstanding achievement by an African American". In June of 1916 he received his degree in Zoology, a huge achievement, making him one of the few black men with degrees from a major university at the time.

Unfortunately, Just still suffered from the abhorrent racism that riddled the US and struggled to further his career, unable to fulfil his goal of a steady income, permitting him to conduct his own research. In 1929, he visited

the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute in Germany where he was able to study with several Nobel Prize winning scientists. From here Just discovered a love for Europe and studied there many times, preferring the far less racist environment. In 1941, Ernest Everett Just passed away, having published two books and a sufficient body of research to forge a reputation as one of the greatest biologists of the modern era.



Ernest Everett Just

### Hidden Figures – Black female representation in NASA

Meg Radford - Lower Sixth

In the 1960s, America sent their first men into space, Alan Shepard, Gus Grissom, and John Glenn. Whilst these men absorbed the accolades of being America's first men in space, behind the scenes, their successes were enabled by hundreds of overshadowed "human computers" who calculated their orbital trajectories. "Human Computers" were often women who made discoveries still fundamental to astronomy today. During World War II, Langley Memorial Aeronautical Laboratory in Virginia began recruiting African American women with college degrees to work as computers. Due to segregation policies, these women became known as the West Area Computers. Over time, these women became engineers, electronic computer programmers and even the first black managers at Langley. In fact, it was the work of such influential women that propelled

women became known as the "Hidden Figures". Three women in particular, Mary Jackson, Katherine Johnson and Dorothy Vaughan went on to produce some of the greatest contributions to space exploration in history. In particular, they helped blaze a trail for mathematicians and engineers of all races and genders to follow. Unlike most engineers, few women were acknowledged in academic publications or for their work on various projects. Additionally, African American computers battled against separate bathrooms and restricted access to meetings. The emboldening work of the "Hidden Figures" paved the way for female representation and appreciation in the aeronautical field for decades to come. The stories of these three women give today's black female astrophysicists a reference point to talk about their own experiences.



Mary Jackson, Katherine Johnson and Dorothy Vaughan - Black female representation in NASA



## James Welton Johnson 1871-1938

James Weldon Johnson was born in Jacksonville, Florida. He was a distinguished civil rights leader in the early decades of the 20th century. A talented poet and novelist himself, his pioneering studies of Black poetry, music, and theatre in the 1920s introduced many Americans to an African American culture, hitherto known mainly through the distorted lens of minstrel shows and dialect poetry. Meanwhile, as head of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) during the 1920s, Johnson led determined civil rights campaigns in an effort to remove the legal, political, and social obstacles hindering Black advancement. Since high schools were closed to Blacks in Jacksonville, Johnson left home to attend both secondary school and college at Atlanta University, where he earned his BA. Returning to Jacksonville in 1894, he was appointed a teacher and principal of the Stanton School and managed to expand the curriculum to include high school-level classes. He also became an active local spokesman on Black social and political issues. In 1895 he founded the *Daily American*, the first Black-oriented daily newspaper in the United States. The newspaper became a voice against racial injustice and served to encourage Black advancement through individual effort—a “self-help” position that echoed the more conservative civil rights leadership of the day.

Meanwhile, Johnson read law with the help of a local white lawyer, and in 1898 he became the first Black lawyer admitted to the Florida Bar since Reconstruction. Johnson practiced law in Jacksonville for several years while continuing to serve as the Stanton School's

principal. He also continued to write poetry and discovered his gift for songwriting in collaboration with his brother Rosamond, a talented composer. Among other songs in a spiritual-influenced popular idiom, Johnson penned the lyrics to “Lift Every Voice and Sing,” a tribute to Black endurance, hope, and religious faith that was later adopted by the NAACP and dubbed “the Negro National Anthem.”

*“A group of young men in Jacksonville, Florida, arranged to celebrate Lincoln's birthday in 1900. My brother, J. Rosamond Johnson, and I decided to write a song to be sung at the exercises. I wrote the words and he wrote the music. Our New York publisher, Edward B. Marks, made mimeographed copies for us, and the song was taught to and sung by a chorus of five hundred colored school children.*

*Shortly afterwards my brother and I moved away from Jacksonville to New York, and the song passed out of our minds. But the school children of Jacksonville kept singing it; they went off to other schools and sang it; they became teachers and taught it to other children. Within twenty years it was being sung over the South and in some other parts of the country.*

*Today the song, popularly known as the Negro National Hymn, is quite generally used. The lines of this song repay me in an elation, almost of exquisite anguish, whenever I hear them sung by Negro children.”*

### Lift Every Voice and Sing

Lift every voice and sing  
Till earth and heaven ring,  
Ring with the harmonies of Liberty;  
Let our rejoicing rise  
High as the listening skies,  
Let it resound loud as the rolling sea.  
Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us,  
Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us.  
Facing the rising sun of our new day begun,  
Let us march on till victory is won.

Stony the road we trod,  
Bitter the chastening rod,  
Felt in the days when hope unborn had died;  
Yet with a steady beat,  
Have not our weary feet  
Come to the place for which our fathers sighed?  
We have come over a way that with tears has been watered,  
We have come, treading our path through the blood of the slaughtered,  
Out from the gloomy past,  
Till now we stand at last  
Where the white gleam of our bright star is cast.

God of our weary years,  
God of our silent tears,  
Thou who hast brought us thus far on the way;  
Thou who hast by Thy might  
Led us into the light,  
Keep us forever in the path, we pray.  
Lest our feet stray from the places, our God, where we met Thee,  
Lest, our hearts drunk with the wine of the world, we forget Thee;  
Shadowed beneath Thy hand,  
May we forever stand.  
True to our God,  
True to our native land

