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Hidden Human Computers: The Black Women of NASA

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Not only was NASA an empire because Langley aerospace facility was largely involved in developing military applications of air power, it was legally Chesterville plantation until 1950. This paper will highlight the tremendous contributions of African American women to NASAs space program as it explores how the daughters of Chesterville plantation slaves returned to the plantation as space pioneers.

This project is a digital archive and corrective history highlighting NASA's Colored Computes <http://omeka.macalester.edu/humancomputerproject/timeline>.

Dozens of African American women worked for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) as expert mathematicians from the 1940 to the mid-1960s. Segregated within NASA facilities in Hampton, Va., well-educated Black women provided the calculations for flights by astronauts John Glenn and Alan Shepherds first trip to the Moon. While the names of these white men and the programs that helped America forge ahead in the "Space Race" are well known, the names of these Black women remain unknown in narratives of these federally funded programs.

I argue that racism, land exploitation, and economic exploitation shape NASA. I have recovered the story of the Black women who worked at a segregated NASA during World War II. These Black women were central to computing in a space of institutionalized racism and sexism. My project addresses land use, racism and social inequality rooted in the colonial past. The Black women hired during World War II were kept secret. The secret was unsustainable because without the contributions of the "Colored Computers," we might not have gone to the moon in 1969.

My research was recently published on December 15, 2016 as a book for young adults. <http://abdopublishing.com/shop/show/9454>