

TALKFEST *HIDDEN FIGURES* – MAY 5th, 2023 - 18:30h - IEN

As the name TalkFest suggests, it is our intention for everyone to be able to participate and decide which of the issues raised by the movie they find most engaging. It is in the hope of enriching the conversation that we are providing some additional resources and questions, not as required reading or points to be followed but as food for thought.

Additional Resources

- [Kimberlé Crenshaw on Intersectionality](#) | Time Magazine
- [Hidden Figures and the Diversity Conversations We Aren't Having](#) | HuffPost
- [STEM Jobs See Uneven Progress in Increasing Gender, Racial and Ethnic Diversity](#) | Pew Research Center

Food for Thought

1. The movie is structured around three parallel stories. How do the challenges faced by the three protagonists compare?
2. In 1989, a law professor called Kimberlé Crenshaw wrote an academic paper on how oppression due to different marginalized identities can combine and intersect. What oppression do the characters in *Hidden Figures* face because of their race? And their gender? How do these different types of oppression intersect?
3. Which was a bigger hurdle for the characters in the film, being black or being women?
4. Are there any options in life that are inaccessible to you because of your identity?
5. What is a “computer” in the movie? How has our use of that word changed?
6. In the movie, Mary Jackson went to court to be able to earn her engineering degree where she argued "someone has to be the first." Have you ever felt you were first to do something? What does it mean to be the first?
7. Do you think people who have achieved success have a responsibility to pay it forward to those who come after?
8. What or who are the “Hidden Figures” referred to in the title to this movie?
9. What has been your experience with women in STEM fields? Have you observed gender-imbalance or discrimination in these fields?

10. What can be done to include, recruit and support women and Black people in fields such as STEM that have excluded these groups?
11. Mary Jackson's husband is resistant to her pursuing engineering and Katherine Goble Johnson has some friction when she begins dating Jim Johnson. How do these personal relationships contribute to the story?
12. Mary Jackson's team leader Karl Zielinski, unlike other white men in the film, values her talent from the beginning and encourages her to become an engineer. How might his identity as a Polish Jewish Holocaust survivor affect the way he sees Mary?
13. Katherine's coworker Paul Stafford removes Katherine's name from reports because he insists that computers cannot author reports. In what ways might this policy be unintentionally (or intentionally) discriminatory?
14. Dorothy Vaughan takes on work she is not paid to do in the hopes of being promoted to supervisor even though she is told there are no plans to assign a "permanent supervisor for the colored group." Why does she continue to do the work?
15. Have you ever found yourself doing work beyond the scope of your pay? How did you handle the situation?
16. The issues over segregating the coffee pots in Katherine's place of work did not happen in real life or in the book the movie is based on. Why might the filmmakers have chosen to invent this detail?
17. There were other scenes, especially involving Katherine's boss, Al Harrison, desegregating NASA and standing up for Katherine, that were invented for the movie. Some have criticized the director, Theodore Melfi, of including "white saviors" in the film, in situations where the Black women actually stood up for themselves. Melfi disagreed, saying that he lives his life as "colorless." What is your take on "white savior" moments in the movie? How might seeing the world as "colorless" be problematic, especially as a white person?

TalkFest Project

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