

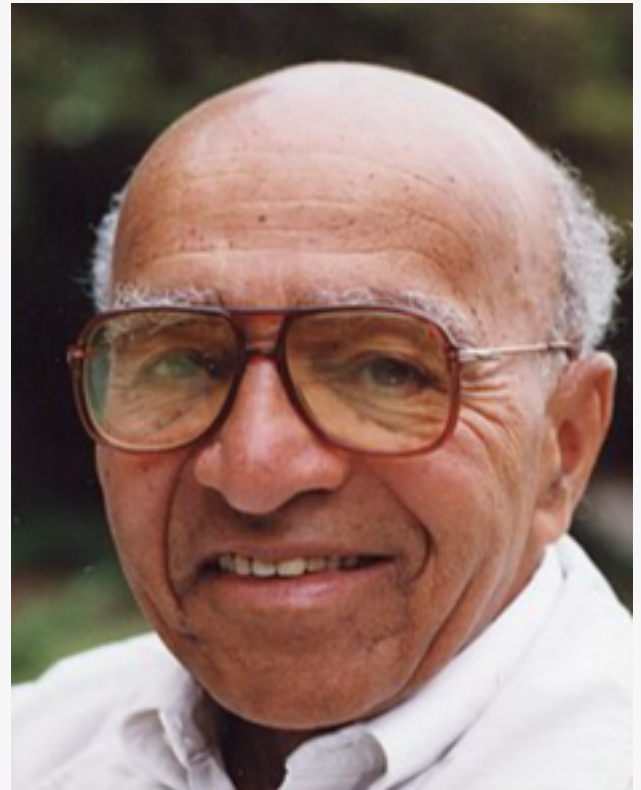
# Juneteenth is a celebration, as well as a day to look toward academic achievement, especially math literacy

*Juneteenth is a day to celebrate with ribs and beer, as well as a day to look toward academic achievement, to include math literacy.*

WASHINGTON, DC, UNITED STATES, June 18, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Those celebrating Juneteenth know that on June 19, 1865, Major General Gordon Granger stood in Galveston, Texas, and read General Order No. 3, announcing freedom to those still enslaved more than two years after the Emancipation Proclamation. That date became Juneteenth — celebrated informally for generations, made an official Texas holiday in 1980, and signed into law as the nation's eleventh federal holiday on June 17, 2021. Juneteenth marks more than a single day of delayed news; it is a celebration and launching.

The Black Student Fund has urged recognition of the relationship between the Reconstruction-Era Juneteenth and current efforts toward Black math literacy for years. Mathematics offers one of the clearest windows into what that opportunity can look like when it's realized; SpaceX's recent IPO, built on the math of machine learning, attests to that. Black mathematicians have repeatedly achieved in math, from the colonial era through the Space Race. From Benjamin Banneker (inventor of the modern American clock) to Elbert Cox (first Black math PhD, 1925), Euphemia Lofton Haynes (first Black woman math PhD, 1943), and David Blackwell, Black mathematicians have contributed inventions and innovation to America often while barred from universities, journals, and professional societies — evidence that the "want" of Black achievement was not, as Banneker argued to Thomas Jefferson, rooted in inability.

Consider J. Ernest Wilkins Jr., who entered the University of Chicago at thirteen and earned his



David Blackwell (1919–2010). Source: Wikipedia / MacTutor History of Mathematics

PhD in mathematics at nineteen. Wilkins went on to work on the Manhattan Project, where he helped develop the Wigner-Wilkins approach that became foundational to nuclear reactor design — work grounded in advanced mathematics that quite literally shaped the nuclear age. He later helped build Howard University's doctoral program in mathematics, ensuring the next generation had a place to train at the highest level.

David Blackwell built a parallel legacy in a different field entirely. A statistician and mathematician, he co-developed the Rao-Blackwell theorem and became a foundational figure in game theory and Bayesian statistics — ideas that now underpin economics, computer science, and decision theory. His influence was significant enough that, decades later, a major computing company (NVIDIA) named a GPU architecture in his honor.

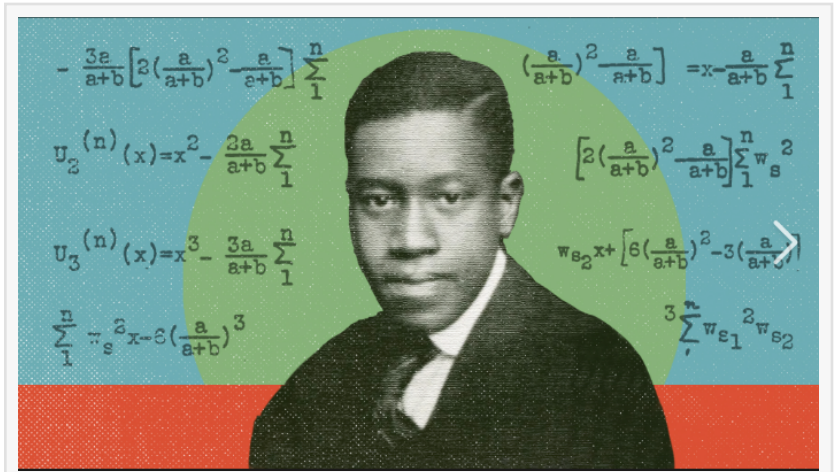
The Washington, DC HBCU, Howard University, founded during the Reconstruction Era, has itself become a hub for this kind of excellence. Elbert Frank Cox, the first person of African descent to earn a PhD in mathematics, taught there for decades, training students who would carry mathematics forward in turn. Some of the best-known Black mathematicians are the ladies lionized in the blockbuster movie

“

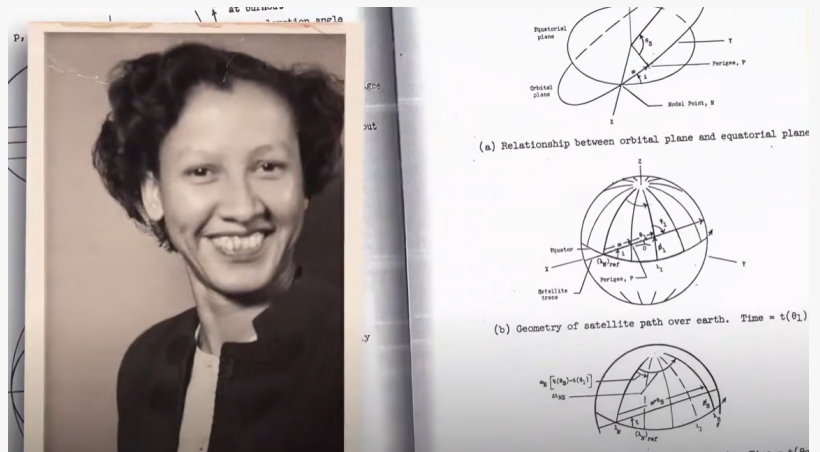
Some things will drop out of the public eye and will go away, but there will always be science, engineering, and technology. And there will always, always be mathematics.”

*Katherine Johnson*

"Hidden Figures," who were "human computers" at NACA/NASA's segregated West Area Computing unit. Johnson calculated trajectories for Alan Shepard, John Glenn, and the Apollo missions; Vaughan became NACA's first Black supervisor; Jackson became NASA's first Black woman engineer. They received the Congressional Gold Medal in 2024; Johnson received the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2015. Scholars like John Urschel, a former NFL offensive lineman who retired from football to become a mathematician and professor at MIT specializing in matrix analysis and graph theory, continue to advance math



Elbert Frank Cox (1895–1969). Source: Cornell Archives



NASA Trailblazer: Katherine Johnson | National Geographic

thinking.

This lineage is why a growing number of writers and institutions now explicitly link Juneteenth to mathematics and science. The Education Trust has published essays under the banner "Juneteenth Was Freedom, Education Is Power." A 2023 piece in the journal *Cell*, written by dozens of Black scientists, frames the holiday as a beacon for the sciences. And scholar Erica Walker's book *Beyond Banneker: Black Mathematicians and the Paths to Excellence* documents this very history in depth.

Juneteenth asks us to remember a hard-won freedom and that, as the University of Illinois Chicago researcher Danny Martin has shown, Black learners are brilliant. The lives of Johnson, Blackwell, Cox, and others ask us to remember what that freedom, fully exercised, can build.

The Black Student Fund sits about a mile from this anchor of Black mathematical achievement at Howard University, and is inspired to continue doing its part to champion math literacy through the [Conchita Poole Math Circle](#) and deployment of [Tantalus](#), a math/arcade game app for children in grades one through five. They are especially proud of the Math Circle's summer math program that will begin near the nation's holiday and is available to all area children who are prepared to double down on the hard work of developing their math literacy. More can be learned about these efforts later this year at the [Black Student Fund & Latino Student Fund Annual School Fair](#) or by going to the Black Student Fund's website.

Leroy Nesbitt  
Black Student Fund  
+1 202-387-1414

[email us here](#)

Visit us on social media:

[Instagram](#)

---

This press release can be viewed online at: <https://www.einpresswire.com/article/920267548>

EIN Presswire's priority is source transparency. We do not allow opaque clients, and our editors try to be careful about weeding out false and misleading content. As a user, if you see something we have missed, please do bring it to our attention. Your help is welcome. EIN Presswire, Everyone's Internet News Presswire™, tries to define some of the boundaries that are reasonable in today's world. Please see our Editorial Guidelines for more information.

© 1995-2026 Newsmatics Inc. All Right Reserved.