

Bob Woodson & The Woodson Principles

b. 1937

Entrepreneurship

Grassroots Leadership

Community Growth

Timeless Principles



Robert "Bob" L. Woodson, Sr. at the Woodson Center headquarters in Washington, D.C. in 2021.

Bob Woodson & The Woodson Principles

Robert Leon “Bob” Woodson Sr. is an American civil rights activist and community development leader.

He is also founder of The Woodson Center — an organization that supports the efforts of low-income communities to improve themselves.



**Do you know what the civil rights movement is?
What does a community development leader do?**



Bob Woodson & The Woodson Principles

Bob Woodson was born in Philadelphia, PA. His father died soon after and he and his four siblings were raised by his mother.

He dropped out of high school to join the Air Force. While in the Air Force he earned a G.E.D.

Do you know what a G.E.D. is?

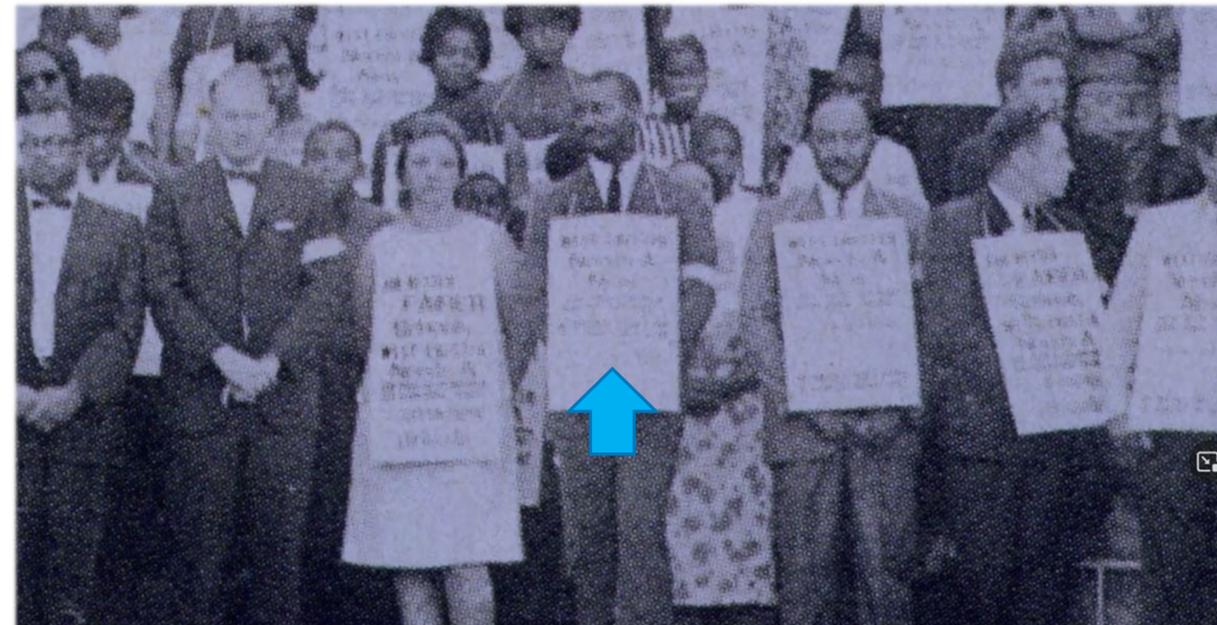
After leaving the Air Force he went on to earn a bachelor's degree in Mathematics and a master's degree in Social Work.



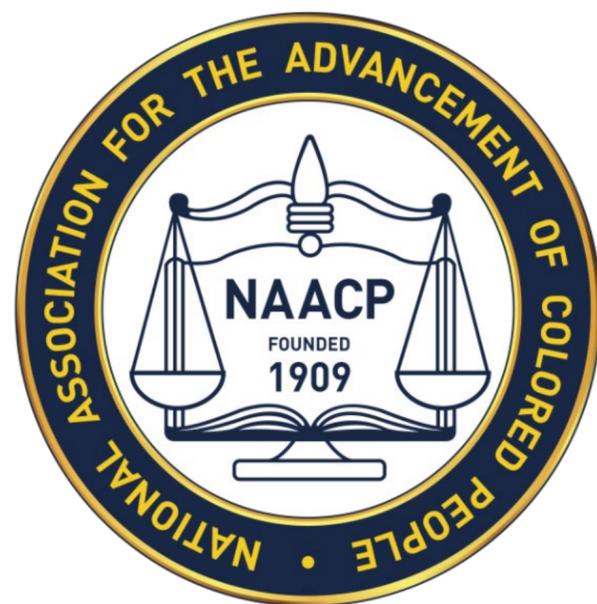
Civil Rights Activism

Robert Woodson has been involved in civil rights and community development since the Sixties.

He has worked with groups such as the NAACP, the National Urban League, and the American Enterprise Institute.



Woodson protesting housing discrimination, mid-1960s.



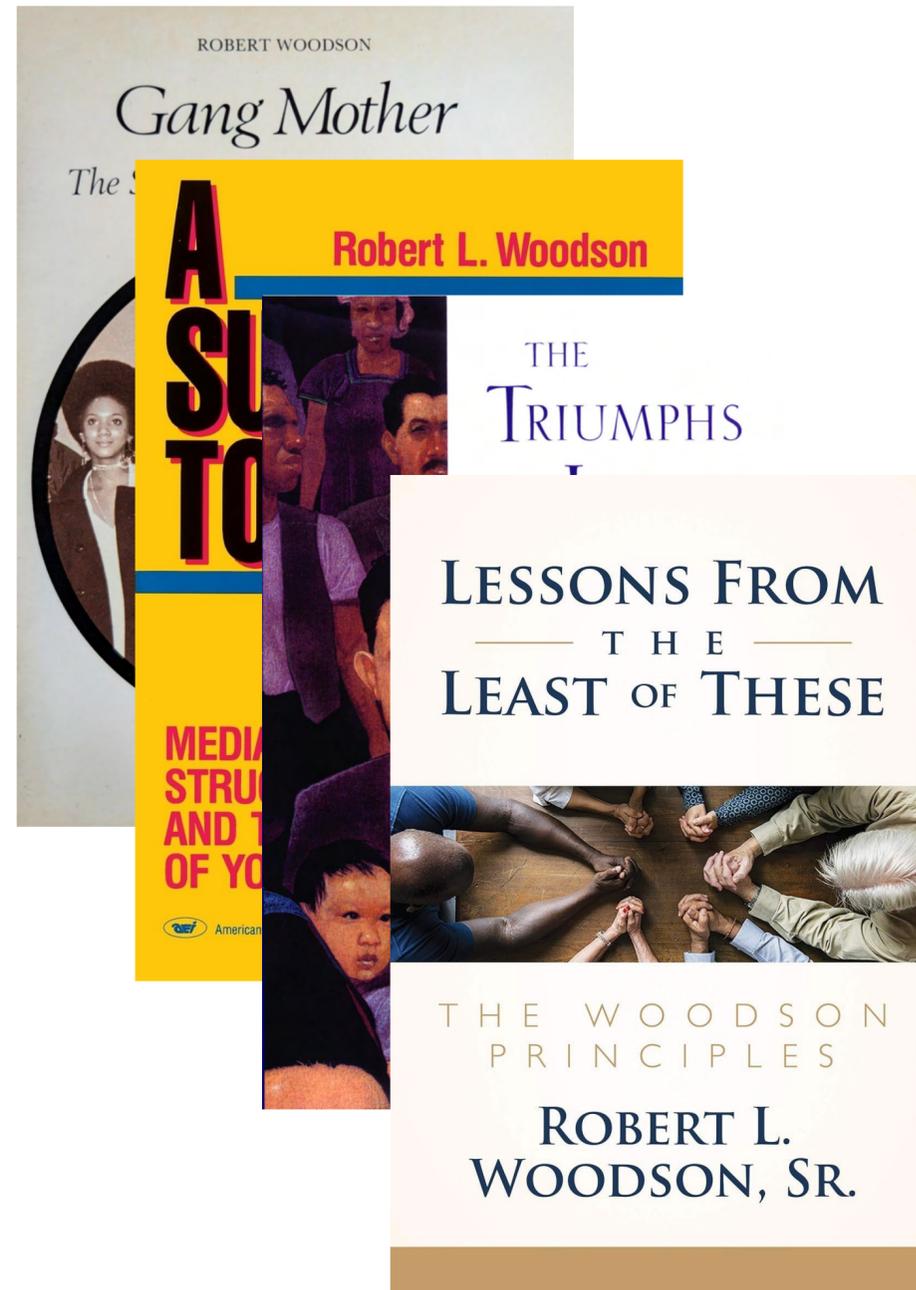
**National
Urban League**



Have you heard of these groups?

What do they do?

Strengthening Communities & Neighborhood Empowerment



Woodson develops programs that seek out families in troubled neighborhoods that have prospered and persevered to learn from their success.

He prefers to focus on what is positive and on what is working, in order to overcome challenges.

He looks for the natural leaders in the community and seeks to empower and equip them to lead others.

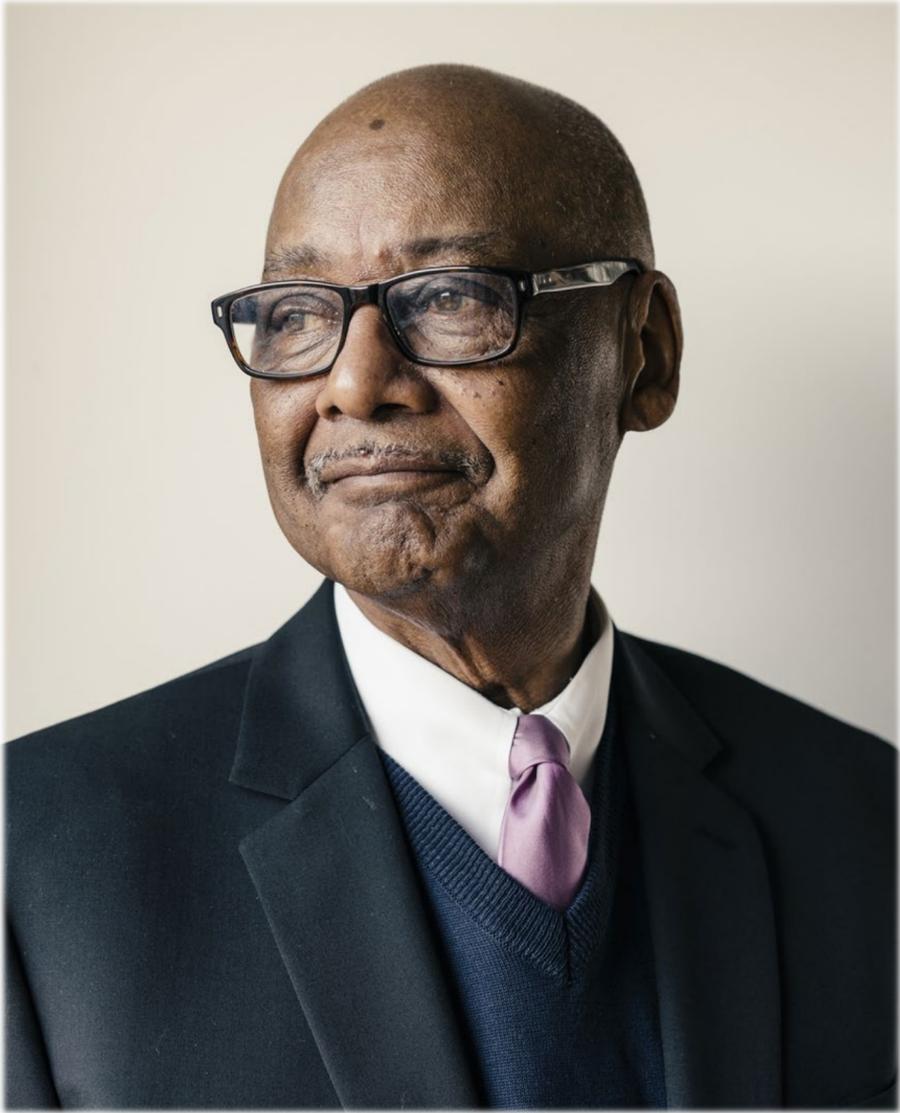
Books by Robert L. Woodson: *Gang Mother: The Story of Sister Falaka Fattah* (1986), *A Summons to Life* (1989), *The Triumphs of Joseph* (1998), and *Lessons from the Least of These: The Woodson Principles* (2020).



The Woodson Principles

Bob Woodson developed a list of 10 Principles that he has used in order to transform struggling neighborhoods and to empower the people within them.

Think about which ones interest you the most as we go through them.



Competence

Integrity

Transparency

Resilience

Witness

Innovation

Inspiration

Agency

Access

Grace

Competence

People who are actually experiencing a problem are the first ones you should look to for a solution. Someone who lives in or near problem areas often has more useful ideas than someone who has just studied a situation from far off.

Who do you trust the most to help you with problems with your friends? With school problems? Why?



Integrity

It is important to get to know people and build trust before trying to help them change. Make sure you are doing things for the right reasons and are willing to stick around and keep your promises. Look for other people who have the same values and can be trusted to work with you.

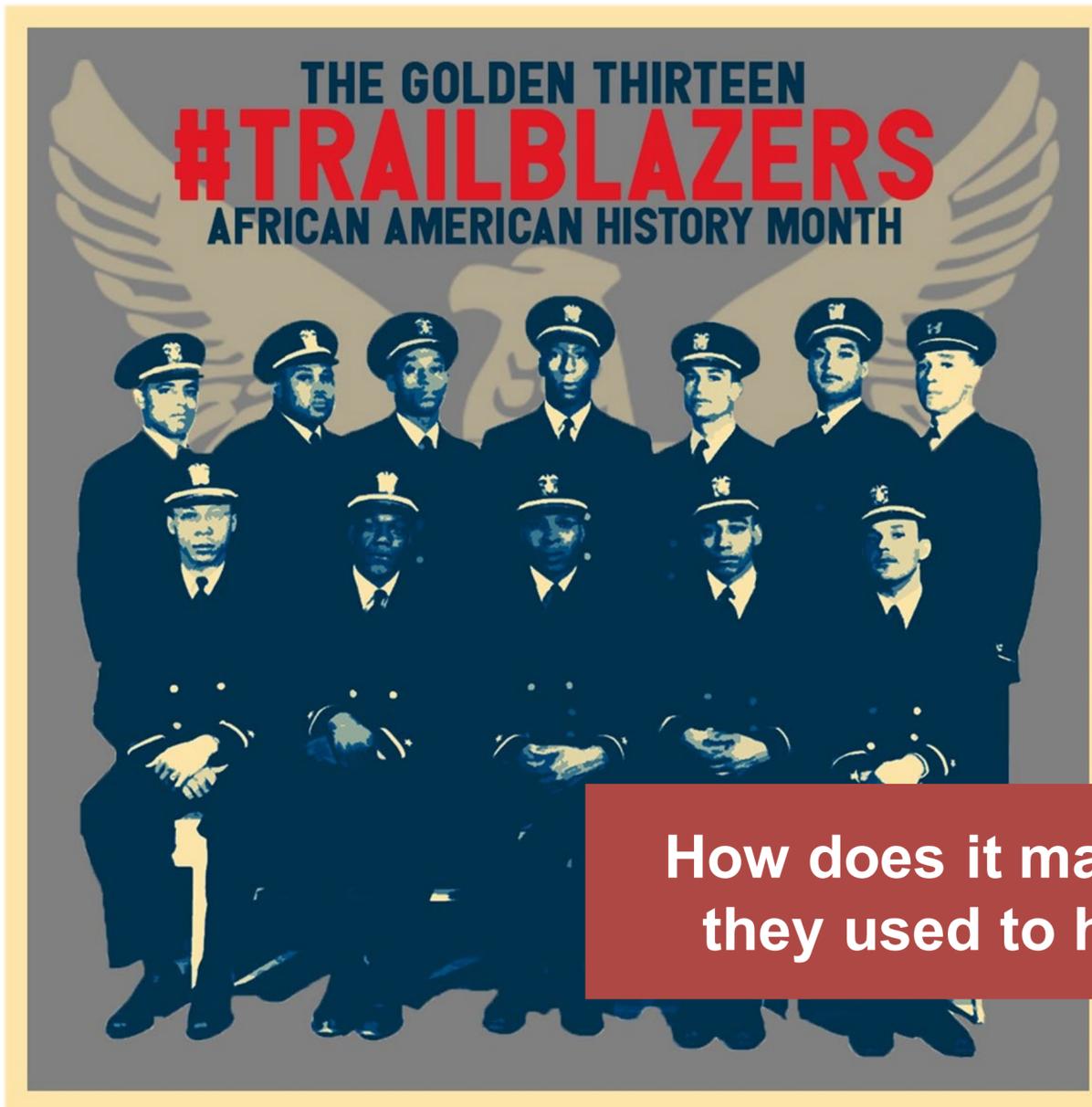
Have you ever felt like someone was trying to help just to make themselves look good?

Have you ever promised to do something and then realized it was going to be harder than you thought? Did you quit?



Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and other activists at the March for Jobs and Freedom in Washington, D.C., 1963.

Transparency



Good leaders are willing to talk about the challenges they faced on the way to success. They aren't too proud to admit their struggles so that others can trust them and learn to believe in themselves.

Remembered as “The Golden Thirteen,” the first-ever class of Black naval officers worked together to pass their rigorous training under tight deadlines.

(Image: Naval History and Heritage Command)

Resilience

Look for and learn from people who overcome challenges and keep a positive attitude. Find the ones who have managed to succeed even in the most difficult situations and see what the secret is to their success.

Track and Field Olympian Alice Coachman, who at the 1948 games became the first Black woman to win Olympic Gold, with her medal in the 1990s.

Who is the most positive person you know?

What helps you keep going when things are hard?



Witness

The best people to help others through hard times are people who have been in similar circumstances.

Knowing someone else who has achieved what you are working for can give you the confidence to believe you can do it, too!



Bob Woodson listens to remarks from tenants' rights advocate Kimi Gray, who successfully helped public housing residents earn the right to buy their homes in the 1980s.

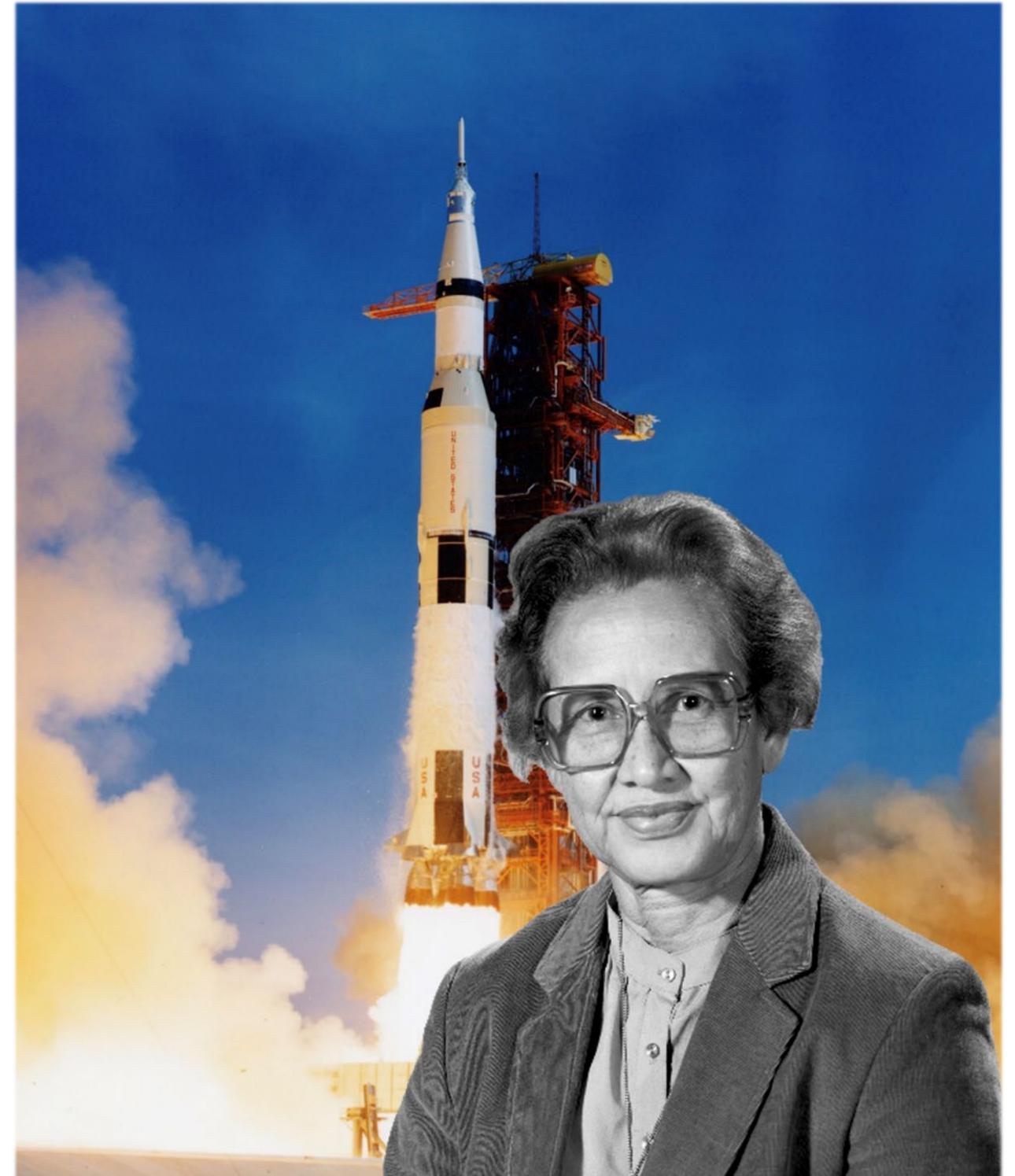
Do you have a hero or role model ?

Innovation

It only takes a few people to have a big impact on a community. Find the people with the best and most original ideas and help them make their ideas a reality to help everyone around them.

Do you know anyone who has started a business or a program to help his or her community?

NASA mathematician Katherine Johnson, whose calculations helped astronauts launch into space and land on the moon.



Inspiration

You can learn nothing from studying failure except how to create failure. People are inspired to improve when they can see a goal that is possible, instead of just a problem to be avoided. Give people tools to work towards their dreams. Then, look for ways to celebrate even small steps forward.

Is there someone you have learned about that helps you believe in yourself and encourages you to dream big?



Agency

No one should be made to feel worthless as a condition for receiving help. It doesn't help to do everything for someone; it is better to let them work for and earn what they achieve. Never do more for them than they are willing to do for themselves. A person should be given the opportunity to give in return for what they receive.

Have you ever asked someone for help and had them do everything for you instead of showing you how to do it yourself? How did that make you feel?

Mural of Benjamin Banneker and his friend and patron, Andrew Ellicott, surveying the territory for the District of Columbia.

William A Smith / Banneker-Douglass Museum.



Access

Make it easy for everyone who needs help to get it. Support small, positive change. Help people make the most of the opportunities presented to them.



What are some obstacles that can keep people from accessing help?

Bob Woodson and local leaders at a ribbon-cutting ceremony in Lowndes County, Alabama during the Center's rural poverty initiative, early 2000s.

Grace



Love and respect others, even when it's difficult. Look past the problems people face to the possibilities and potential inside them. Be free of bitterness, regret, and uncertainty about the future.

Why can it be difficult to forgive people, even those we love?

What good comes from looking past others' failing?

Philanthropist, millionaire real-estate investor, and freed slave Biddy Mason. Painting by Elizabeth Colomba, 2006. Collection of Mattie McFadden-Lawson and Ambassador Michael A. Lawson (ret.), © 2021 Elizabeth Colomba/Artists Rights Society.

Self Reflection

What do you think about the Woodson Principles?

Do you already possess or practice any of these principles?

Which interest you the most?

Which one do you think would be hardest for you to practice right now?

How might you begin to develop these principles in your own life?



Vocabulary

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WOODSON
CENTER

BLACK *History*
and **EXCELLENCE**