

Film Appreciation Group — review of Hidden Figures

The June showing of Hidden Figures was immensely enjoyed by 8 members. Based on a true story, the film portrays the roles of three African American women at NASA at the start of the Gemini programme, when the USA was aiming to make John Glenn their first man in space, trying — as they were — to catch up with the Russians.

Overcoming prejudice of both gender and race, as well as legal obstacles, the three protagonists (an exceptional mathematician, a brilliant but initially unqualified engineer, and a highly skilled logician who became the first NASA mainframe computer supervisor) won the respect of their colleagues and made a huge contribution to the US space programme (which was eventually recognised decades later with formal awards).

Told simply with a single timeline, the film took a few liberties with the actual timeline and events, but stuck fairly close to reality. The main characters were played superbly (Taraji P Henson as Katherine Johnson, Janelle Monae as Mary Jackson, and Octavia Spencer as Dorothy Vaughan), and the supporting cast was also excellent (including Kevin Costner, Kirsten Dunst and Jim Parsons). A very good film, it was nominated for 3 Oscars at the 2017 ceremony.