

[Episode 25 - Evelyn Granville Transcript]

Evelyn Granville was one of the first African American women to earn a PhD in the United States. She was born in Washington D.C. on May 1, 1924. The Great Depression hit when she was about five years old, and thus her family was poor, and her parents struggled to make a living. Her father went from job to job, but they always had food on the table. When her parents split up, Evelyn and her sister lived with her mother, Julia, and their aunt, Louise. Louise was more interested in academics than Julia was, and therefore encouraged Evelyn to pursue an education. Evelyn attended Dunbar High School and graduated as the valedictorian. Due to the era, Dunbar High School was a segregated school, but the school was also designed to push students towards higher education and success. Evelyn had her sights set on going to college, and although her mother and her aunt were not wealthy, they encouraged her to pursue her education. They were able to save up enough money to make her freshman year at Smith College possible. After her first year, she was awarded scholarships which enabled her to continue in her college education. She was later offered scholarships from Yale University and continued her education there where she graduated with a PhD in mathematics. This made her the second African American woman in American history to earn a PhD in math. In terms of career, Evelyn's dream had been to become a teacher. Over her lifetime she taught math at various schools, including New York University, Fisk University in Nashville, and Texas University. She also worked in the field of computer programming with the International Business Machines Corporation which during the time Evelyn worked there became affiliated with NASA. She was working at Texas University until she retired in 1997, and she is still alive today at the age of 93. She saw and felt the limitations that society was putting on African American individuals at the time and admired those who had worked hard despite these obstacles. As Evelyn herself said we accepted education as the means to rise above the limitations that a prejudiced society endeavored to place upon us. Although Evelyn faced the challenges of segregation and poverty in her lifetime, she was able to rise above the crowd and pursue success. I hope that you, the listener, are inspired by hearing her story.