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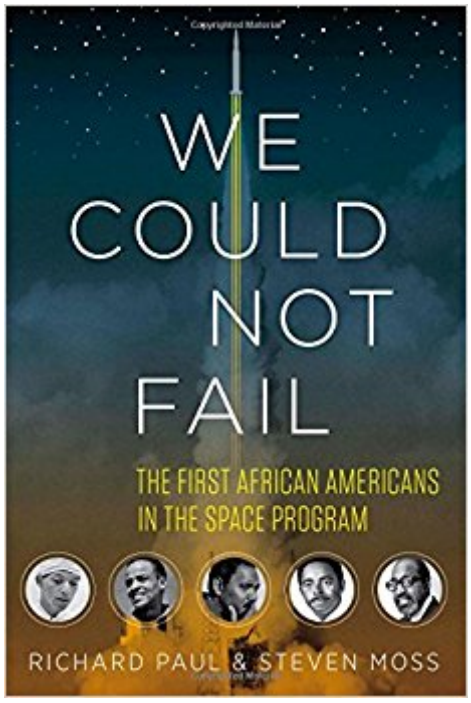
We Could Not Fail: The First African Americans In The Space Program



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Synopsis

.The Space Age began just as the struggle for civil rights forced Americans to confront the long and bitter legacy of slavery, discrimination, and violence against African Americans. Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson utilized the space program as an agent for social change, using federal equal employment opportunity laws to open workplaces at NASA and NASA contractors to African Americans while creating thousands of research and technology jobs in the Deep South to ameliorate poverty. We Could Not Fail tells the inspiring, largely unknown story of how shooting for the stars helped to overcome segregation on earth.Richard Paul and Steven Moss profile ten pioneer African American space workers whose stories illustrate the role NASA and the space program played in promoting civil rights. They recount how these technicians, mathematicians, engineers, and an astronaut candidate surmounted barriers to move, in some cases literally, from the cotton fields to the launching pad. The authors vividly describe what it was like to be the sole African American in a NASA work group and how these brave and determined men also helped to transform Southern society by integrating colleges, patenting new inventions, holding elective office, and reviving and governing defunct towns. Adding new names to the roster of civil rights heroes and a new chapter to the story of space exploration, We Could Not Fail demonstrates how African Americans broke the color barrier by competing successfully at the highest level of American intellectual and technological achievement.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

What an eye opener for those of us who lived through the 1960s in the South, and thought we knew well all events there. I loved reading this book because the story of big government policy and wonderful ordinary men shows how history really happens. Even if it is a bit scholarly sometimes, the book is an enjoyable read. The character of the men who were good at math and wanted to work in the space program shines through the Jim Crow constraints with which they had to contend.

A good comprehensive look into how NASA with its many locations in the South made inroads to help alleviate poverty for all Southerners and prejudice against blacks in the South. Of course, unfortunately, prejudice will never be totally eradicated; but this book gives good insight into the many ways that NASA succeeded, and the ways it could not, as told by the people who lived it.

You have to admire all of the folks who worked so hard despite the prejudices against their success. This should be required reading for everyone. It clearly shows how discrimination is subtle. We have come a long way but their are plenty of southerners and northerners who still have these attitudes. Inspirational!

This book presents a balanced view of an extremely complex subject. Based largely on interviews with principals involved, it challenges some popular ideas about the subject which is an admirable accomplishment in writing history. A few seminal events in the history of NASA/African American relations, such as the "confrontation" between NASA leadership and a poor people's march at Cape Canaveral on the eve of the launch of Apollo 11 are not included, but the material covered is an important contribution to the subject.

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