

Charting New Courses: Edwina Justus, UP's First Black Woman Locomotive Engineer

A standout figure in this narrative is Edwina Justus, who holds the notable distinction of being the first Black woman locomotive engineer for Union Pacific (UP). Her story, however, extends far beyond this remarkable achievement, encompassing a series of pioneering 'firsts' that underscore her exceptional journey.

Edwina Justus's career with Union Pacific was marked by a series of groundbreaking milestones. In 1976, she made history when she became the first Black woman to take the helm as a locomotive engineer for UP, a role traditionally dominated by men and one that had never before been held by a Black woman. Justus's entry into this position was a significant step not only for her but for the broader railroad industry, challenging long-standing gender and racial stereotypes.

However, Justus's trailblazing path began well before her historic appointment as a locomotive engineer. Her journey with UP started in non-traditional roles, where she first demonstrated her unwavering resolve and exceptional capabilities. She navigated through various positions, each time proving her adeptness and readiness for more challenging roles. Her versatility and determination in these early roles laid the groundwork for her eventual breakthrough into locomotive engineering.

Moreover, Justus's life is characterized by a series of pioneering 'firsts.' She was the first in her family to attend college, a significant personal achievement that set the stage for her future successes. This pursuit of education and her subsequent career choices reflect her determination to break barriers and set new benchmarks, not just for herself but for others who would follow in her footsteps.

At SMART, we are inspired by Edwina Justus's remarkable career and her role as a trailblazer in the railroad industry. Her story resonates with our commitment to fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion within the transportation sector. Justus's journey is a powerful reminder of the importance of representation and the positive impact it can have on breaking down barriers and opening doors for future generations.

Our "Women In Transit" campaign celebrates the legacy of pioneers like Edwina Justus. As we honor her historic contribution to Union Pacific and the railroad industry, we also acknowledge the broader impact of her career. Her achievements are a testament to the importance of perseverance, courage, and the pursuit of opportunities, regardless of the challenges that may arise.

As we commemorate Women's Month, let's reflect on the extraordinary life and career of Edwina Justus. Her contributions extend beyond her role as a locomotive engineer; they symbolize a journey of resilience, determination, and pioneering spirit. At SMART, we are committed to continuing this legacy, ensuring that our services and our workforce reflect the diversity, strength, and pioneering spirit of the communities we serve.