



Making Their Mark: Black Women Leaders

When Mae Carol Jemison watched the televised flights of Gemini and Apollo spacecraft as a child, she knew someday she would go to space. Her certainty was remarkable since it would be more than a decade before an American woman or any African American left Earth's atmosphere.

Born in Decatur, Alabama, Jemison spent most of her young life in Chicago. Her mother taught in the Chicago public school system, and Jemison credits her parents' encouragement of education and exploration for her life in science.

"Sometimes people want to tell you to act or to be a certain way," Jemison said during an event at her high school shortly after she returned from space. "Sometimes people want to limit you because of their own limited imaginations."

After attending Stanford University in California and graduating from Cornell Medical College in New York, Jemison became a Peace Corps medical officer and worked in Liberia and Sierra Leone for two years. Previously, she earned a degree in chemical engineering

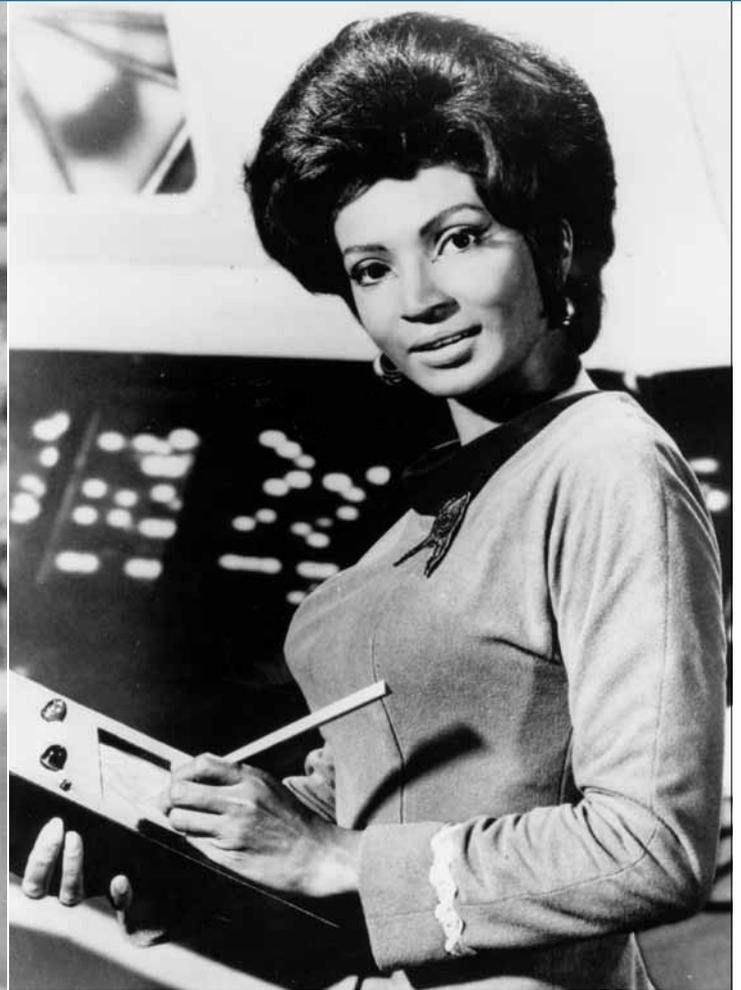


Mae Jemison: Scientist, Doctor, Astronaut. NASA

and African-American studies from Cornell University.

Jemison was inspired to apply to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) by two figures — one real and

one fictional: Sally Ride, the first woman in space, and Lieutenant Uhura, the African-American female crew member in the Star Trek television series Jemison loved as a child.



Jemison's role models: Sally Ride, left, the first woman in space, joined NASA with the help of Nichelle Nichols, who became a NASA recruiter several years following her role as Lt. Uhura in "Star Trek." Photo left: © AP images. Photo right: Great Images in NASA.

She was mission specialist for the September 1992 trip of the space shuttle Endeavour, becoming the

A different view of the world: A childhood interest in astronomy, degrees in chemical engineering and Afro-American studies, term as a Peace Corps doctor — Jemison's imagination carried her beyond traditional boundaries into space. © AP Images

first African-American woman in space. Since her groundbreaking spaceflight, Jemison has encouraged children toward careers in the sciences.

In 2009, she participated with President Obama in a White House stargazing party and joined Michelle Obama to talk to youth in underprivileged schools about the importance of education.

"When I grew up, in the 1960's," Jemison writes in the New York Times, "the only American astronauts were men. Looking out the window of that space shuttle, I

thought if that little girl growing up in Chicago could see her older self now, she would have a huge grin on her face."

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