First Black Crew Member to Join International Space Station

By Shantella Y. Sherman (AFRO/NNPA Member)

he National Aero-(NASA) has selected astronaut Jeanette Epps to join the crew of the International Space Station in 2018. Epps will become the first Black crewmem-

when she was first introduced to the idea that she could be an astronaut. "It was about 1980, nautics and Space I was nine years old. Administration My brother came home and he looked at my grades and my twin sisters' grades and he said, 'You know, you guys can probably become aero-

that Sally Ride [the first American woman to fly in space] and a group of women were selected to become astronauts — the first time in history. So, he made that comment and I said, 'Wow, that would be so cool."

Epps will join veteran NASA astronaut Andrew space engineers or even Feustel at the Space Stahe served as a flight engineer on Expedition 55, and later as commander of Expedition 56.

"Each space station crew brings something different to the table, and Drew and Jeanette both have a lot to offer," said Chris Cassidy, chief of the Astronaut Office at NASA's Johnson Space Center in Houston, in a statement. "The space station will benefit from having them on board."

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Astronaut Jeanette Epps

NASA astronaut Jeanette Epps will be the first Black crewmember to live and work on the International Space Station for an extended period of time. (NASA)

ber to represent the U.S. astronauts," Epps said. tion. On Feustel's first on the station.

The journey will mark the first time Epps has traveled to orbit, allowing her to follow in the footsteps of the women who, she said, inspired her to become an astronaut.

While other Black astronauts have flown to the Space Station for brief stays during the outpost's construction, Epps will be the first Black crewmember to live and work on the station for an extended period of time. Her journey aboard the Soyuz spacecraft and stay at the station places her as the only American and female among a crew made up of mostly Russians and men.

"I'm a person just like they are. I do the same work as they do," Epps told a group of STEM students at her Syracuse alma mater, Danforth Middle School. "If something breaks, anyone of us will have to be able to go out the door. We have to be jacks of all trades. It's not a job that's like any other."

While working on her doctorate, Epps was a NASA graduate student Researchers Project fellow, authoring several journal and conference articles about her research. After completing her graduate studies, Epps worked in a research lab for more than two years, co-authoring multiple patents, before being recruited by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). She was a CIA technical intelligence officer for about seven years before being selected as a member of the 2009 astronaut class.

"Anything you don't know is going to be hard at first," Epps said in a video statement about the launch. "But if you stay the course, put the time and effort in, it will become seamless eventually."

Epps, in the NASA video interview, shared

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Berit Stevenson Procurement and Contracts Manager 503-802-8541 Berit.Stevenson@homeforward.org

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