

Black History

First Black Crew Member to Join International Space Station

By Shantella Y. Sherman (AFRO/ NNPA Member)

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) has selected astronaut Jeanette Epps to join the crew of the International Space Station in 2018. Epps will become the first Black crewmember to represent the U.S. 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

“I'm a person just like they are. I do the same work as they do

become seamless eventually.”

Epps, in the NASA video interview, shared when she was first introduced to the idea that she could be an astronaut. "It was about 1980, I was nine years old. 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 aerospace engineers or even astronauts,'" Epps said. "And this was at the time that Sally Ride [the first American woman to fly in space] and a group



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.

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 Feustel at the Space Station. On Feustel's first long-duration mission, he 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."

The AFRO is a member publication of the National Newspaper Publishers Association. Learn more about becoming a member at www.nnpa.org.

Davis cont'd from pg 5

as good to get half as much as his fellow White male scholars (and the situation was far worse for black women scholars like Elizabeth Stubbs Davis). Only through compiling a truly remarkable record of achievement, and only amid the national fervor to make the U.S. the "arsenal of democracy" during World War II, would Chicago even consider appointing Allison Davis. Even then, he only received a three-year contract on the condition that the Julius Rosenwald Foundation (JRF) agree to subsidize most of his salary.

Even with the subsidy, certain university faculty members, such as Georgia-born sociologist William Fielding Ogburn, actively opposed the appointment on racist grounds. So, too, did some trustees at the JRF, including the wealthy New Orleans philanthropist Edgar B. Stern, who attempted to sabotage the grant. Discounting Davis' accomplishments and implying instead a sort of reverse racism, Stern asserted that "the purpose of this move is to have Davis join the Chicago Faculty, not in spite of the fact that he is a Negro but because he is a Negro." Similarly myopic charges have been a staple of criticism against affirmative actions programs in more recent times.

The Quadrangle Club where (white) faculty gathered at University of Chicago, midcentury. University of Chicago Photographic Archive, apf2-06088, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

The opposition ultimately failed to torpedo Davis' appointment, but it did underscore the type of environment he would face at Chicago. As faculty members openly debated if he should even be allowed to instruct the university's mainly white students, the administration barred him from the Quadrangle Club, where faculty regularly gathered and ate lunch. In a private letter to him, the university made clear that it "cannot assume responsibility for Mr. Davis' personal happiness and his social treatment."

As time wore on, such overt racism did begin

to ebb, or at least confine itself to more private quarters. What never did subside, though, was an equally pernicious institutional racism that marginalized Davis' accomplishments and rendered him professionally invisible.

As Davis collaborated with renowned white scholars at Chicago, his contributions were submergued under theirs — even when he was the first author and chief theorist of the work. When Daniel Patrick Moynihan, writing for *Commentary* magazine in 1968, failed to count Davis among his list of Black scholars who studied black poverty (even though Davis was among the most prolific Black scholars in that area), he registered the depth of Davis' marginalization. Such marginalization, which stemmed also from Davis' interdisciplinary approach and iconoclasm, has caused even historians to lose track of him and his important career.

Davis was ensnared by the racism he studied

Even the most exceptional African Americans have never been able to transcend the racial system that ensnares them. Davis' appointment did not usher in a new era of integration of faculties at predominantly white universities. It took another three decades for substantial numbers of Black scholars to begin receiving offers of full-time, tenure-track employment. And because of the vastly disproportionate rates of poverty, incarceration and municipal neglect plaguing the black community, jobs in higher education often continued — and still continue — to be out of reach.

Few people better understood, or more thoughtfully analyzed, these very realities than did Allison Davis. This was a man who laid bare the systems of race and class that govern American life. He understood that education needed to be a bulwark for democracy, not merely a ladder for individual social mobility. He embodied how to confront injustice with sustained, productive resistance. Moreover, this was a man who refused to surrender to despair, and who chose to dedicate his life to making the country a better, more equal, more democratic place.

David Varel is a visiting assistant professor of history at the University of Mississippi.



Proud to celebrate the history and accomplishments of Portland's Black community, PCRI's newest housing will honor pioneer Beatrice Morrow at the former Grant Warehouse site.

80 apartments coming late-summer 2018

Learn more and stay engaged by reading *The Skanner* and at www.pcrihome.org

BECAUSE EVERYONE SHOULD BE ABLE TO AFFORD A STABLE PLACE TO LIVE AND THRIVE.



Portland Community Reinvestment Initiatives
6329 NE Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd
Portland, OR 97211

(503) 288-2923 | TTY 711

