

Mae Jemison

Jemison, Mae



Record Information

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Date: b. 1956-

Description:

Mae C. Jemison, the first black woman in space, was born on October 17, 1956. Her achievements as a biomedical engineer, a medical officer for the Peace Corps in Sierra Leone and Liberia, and an astronaut aboard the shuttle *Endeavor*, prove that women and members of minority groups can succeed in science and technology fields. Jemison left NASA in 1993 to establish The Jemison Group, Inc., a Houston-based company that designs programs utilizing advanced technology to solve social problems in developing nations. She was also the director of The Jemison Institute for Advancing Technology in Developing Countries at Dartmouth College where she was a professor of environmental studies. Jemison is currently Andrew D. White Professor-at-Large at Cornell University. She lives in Houston.

On September 12, 1992, Mae Jemison lifted off into space aboard the Space Shuttle *Endeavor* and became the first African-American woman in space. Before and since, she has made contributions as an engineer, physician, social scientist, educator, and advocate for women and African Americans in science.

The youngest of three children, Mae Carol Jemison was born on October 17, 1956, to Charlie and Dorothy Jemison in Decatur, Alabama. She grew up in Chicago, Illinois, where her mother taught English and math, and her father worked as a maintenance supervisor. Jemison developed an early interest in science and was a strong student. After graduating in 1973 from Morgan Park High School in Chicago, she earned both a bachelor of science degree in chemical engineering and a bachelor of arts degree in African-American studies in 1977 from northern California's Stanford University, one of the foremost U.S. educational institutions. She went on to receive a medical degree from Cornell University in 1981, also traveling during these years to Cuba, Kenya, and Thailand, where she provided primary medical care. She completed her internship the following year at the Los Angeles County/University of Southern California Medical Center.

Jemison worked briefly as a general practitioner with the INA/Ross Loos Medical Group in Los Angeles, prior to two years of Peace Corps service (1983–85) in Sierra Leone and Liberia in West Africa, where she served as the area medical officer. There,

she managed medical service for both the Peace Corps and the U.S. embassy, supervising the medical staff as well as laboratory and pharmacy personnel. During this time, she also worked with the Centers for Disease Control and the National Institutes of Health on vaccine research for hepatitis B, schistosomiasis ("snail fever," considered the most widespread parasitic disease after malaria) and rabies.

Following her return from the Peace Corps in 1985, Jemison worked as a general practitioner for CIGNA Health Plans of California, while pursuing graduate engineering studies in Los Angeles. In 1987, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) selected her as one of 15 successful astronaut candidates from a field of 2,000 applicants. When she completed her training in 1988, she became qualified as a "mission specialist," or scientist-astronaut, the first black female astronaut in NASA history and NASA's fifth black astronaut. She resigned from NASA in 1993.

References and Further Information

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