



New episodes every month!

**Episode 27:
The Rocket Ranch:
Being Black in the
NASA Family,
Finding Inspiration,
and Becoming More
Inclusive**

February 2021

@NASAKennedy

#NASARocketRanch

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00:00:07,770 --> 00:00:12,680

From the women whose calculations helped land the first man on the moon, to the first black

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00:00:12,680 --> 00:00:17,850

astronaut to live aboard the International Space Station for an extended stay, NASA has

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00:00:17,850 --> 00:00:23,520

stretched the limits of what humankind can achieve due in no small part to the contributions

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00:00:23,520 --> 00:00:25,290

of black Americans.

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00:00:25,290 --> 00:00:31,490

There have been a number of people who have helped me a great deal throughout my career

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00:00:31,490 --> 00:00:32,710

here at NASA.

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00:00:32,710 --> 00:00:35,590

And they feel like family members to me.

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00:00:35,590 --> 00:00:40,520

The Rocket Ranch welcomes Sheldon Lauderdale, Program Analyst for NASA's Commercial Crew

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00:00:40,520 --> 00:00:45,030

Program, which last year returned human spaceflight to orbit from U.S. soil.

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00:00:45,030 --> 00:00:49,180

Shel will tell us what it's like to be part of the NASA family.

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00:00:49,180 --> 00:00:54,680

He'll share where he draws inspiration, plus,

he'll talk about his role supporting NASA's

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00:00:54,680 --> 00:01:00,210
efforts to expand diversity and inclusion
to empower the next generation of explorers.

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00:01:00,210 --> 00:01:03,489
I'm Marie Lewis, and this is the Rocket Ranch.

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00:01:03,489 --> 00:01:08,126
EGS program chief engineer verifying no constraints
to launch.

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00:01:08,126 --> 00:01:10,819
Three, two, one, and lift off.

16
00:01:10,819 --> 00:01:12,739
Welcome to space.

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00:01:15,020 --> 00:01:16,299
All right.

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00:01:16,299 --> 00:01:18,139
Welcome, Sheldon Lauderdale.

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00:01:18,139 --> 00:01:19,259
Thanks for being here.

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00:01:19,259 --> 00:01:20,500
Thank you for having me.

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00:01:20,500 --> 00:01:25,210
You are the Management and Program Analyst
for NASA's Commercial Crew Program.

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00:01:25,210 --> 00:01:30,229
I know you're currently working a detail assignment
to the Launch Services Program.

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00:01:30,229 --> 00:01:34,369
But in a sentence or two, can you sum up what
does that job entail?

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00:01:34,369 --> 00:01:41,420
So I basically manage the budget and the people
for the Launch Services Program and the Commercial

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00:01:41,420 --> 00:01:42,420
Crew Program.

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00:01:42,420 --> 00:01:43,880
I help with that function.

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00:01:43,880 --> 00:01:45,520
So I'm a budget guy.

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00:01:45,520 --> 00:01:49,631
And so I've been a budget guy my entire career,
and that's what I'm doing now.

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00:01:49,631 --> 00:01:51,319
So it's pretty exciting.

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00:01:51,319 --> 00:01:54,139
As you know, nothing moves without money.

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00:01:54,139 --> 00:01:55,139
Exactly.

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00:01:55,139 --> 00:01:58,100
So I always have to remind my technical friends
of that fact.

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00:01:58,100 --> 00:01:59,270
So yeah, that's what I'm doing.

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00:01:59,270 --> 00:02:00,270

Absolutely.

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00:02:00,270 --> 00:02:02,869

I've been on the detail about six months,
so it's pretty exciting.

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00:02:02,869 --> 00:02:03,869

Okay, great.

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00:02:03,869 --> 00:02:06,929

Well we certainly appreciate the job that
you do.

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00:02:06,929 --> 00:02:07,929

Yes.

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00:02:07,929 --> 00:02:12,569

So this year's Black History Month theme is
family.

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00:02:12,569 --> 00:02:16,660

And I know we've talked about this a little
bit before, but what does it mean to you to

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00:02:16,660 --> 00:02:19,380

be part of the NASA family?

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00:02:19,380 --> 00:02:20,950

Sure.

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00:02:20,950 --> 00:02:27,170

There have been a number of people who have
helped me a great deal throughout my career

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00:02:27,170 --> 00:02:31,590

here at NASA, and they feel like family members
to me.

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00:02:31,590 --> 00:02:33,800

I will acknowledge a few of them today.

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00:02:33,800 --> 00:02:35,980

This is by no means all of them.

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00:02:35,980 --> 00:02:44,170

Mack McKinney, Roslyn McKinney, Nap Carroll,
Jim Jennings, Pat Hanan, folks like Cheryl

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00:02:44,170 --> 00:02:49,220

McPhillips, Connie Milton, Roselle Hanson,
Bob Sampson.

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00:02:49,220 --> 00:02:51,330

I could go on and on and on.

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00:02:51,330 --> 00:02:57,710

And the cool thing is that a lot of these
folks were higher grades than me or managers

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00:02:57,710 --> 00:03:02,760

even, and they treated me just like a normal
person.

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00:03:02,760 --> 00:03:09,070

They didn't have an air of superiority or
invincibility about them, and they really

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00:03:09,070 --> 00:03:11,520

helped me along the way.

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00:03:11,520 --> 00:03:15,260

And so I'm very grateful for those individuals.

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00:03:15,260 --> 00:03:19,910

And they do feel like a part of my family
because I'm working with these folks...

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00:03:19,910 --> 00:03:21,970

And folks that I'm working with right now.

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00:03:21,970 --> 00:03:22,970

Mm-hmm.

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00:03:22,970 --> 00:03:23,970

Right?

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00:03:23,970 --> 00:03:29,650

I work with these people all day, every day,
not during COVID of course.

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00:03:29,650 --> 00:03:33,070

But they feel like family members to me.

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00:03:33,070 --> 00:03:40,020

So that's just a little bit of what family
means to me being out here at NASA.

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00:03:40,020 --> 00:03:45,570

And the picture of the NASA family has certainly
evolved over the years.

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00:03:45,570 --> 00:03:53,380

I know generations ago, NASA was by all appearances
dominated by white males, and that makes me

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00:03:53,380 --> 00:03:59,250

curious to ask you when you were growing up,
was NASA something you aspired to?

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00:03:59,250 --> 00:04:01,380

If so, what was the inspiration?

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00:04:01,380 --> 00:04:04,120

And if not, what changed?

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00:04:04,120 --> 00:04:08,980

I did not aspire to work for NASA.

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00:04:08,980 --> 00:04:13,610
I didn't dream about what was out in space.

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00:04:13,610 --> 00:04:17,970
I mean I looked out there and tried to count the stars, of course, like all kids do, but

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00:04:17,970 --> 00:04:22,030
I had no desire, if you will, to work for NASA.

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00:04:22,030 --> 00:04:28,050
I was more interested in working for Wall Street, that's what I wanted to do.

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00:04:28,050 --> 00:04:35,800
And so my career path and it's classes that I took, et cetera, led me down to that path.

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00:04:35,800 --> 00:04:38,539
Mm-hmm.

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00:04:38,539 --> 00:04:40,690
And I didn't get a chance to do that.

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00:04:40,690 --> 00:04:44,909
So I took a little detour, I worked in banking in Alabama at some places.

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00:04:44,909 --> 00:04:49,289
And I did an internship down here at NASA back in 1994.

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00:04:49,289 --> 00:04:54,710
Again, met some awesome people during my time there, Mr. J. Diggs, Miss Evelyn Johnson,

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00:04:54,710 --> 00:04:56,529

the folks that I mentioned earlier.

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00:04:56,529 --> 00:05:01,490
And they were at a certain level at that time.

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00:05:01,490 --> 00:05:06,039
And I enjoyed my experience then, but I said
I'm not working for the government.

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00:05:06,039 --> 00:05:07,240
I'm just not going to do it.

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00:05:07,240 --> 00:05:08,240
And here you are.

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00:05:08,240 --> 00:05:12,020
And so my mother worked for the government
and she would always tell me, "You need to

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00:05:12,020 --> 00:05:13,039
get on with the government.

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00:05:13,039 --> 00:05:15,159
You need to work for the government."

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00:05:15,159 --> 00:05:22,360
And so I finally listened and an opportunity
came up at my school back in 2001.

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00:05:22,360 --> 00:05:24,750
And I interviewed and I got the job.

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00:05:24,750 --> 00:05:25,879
And so I've been here ever since.

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00:05:25,879 --> 00:05:31,009
So now I'm mad that I didn't start work right
away because I'd be five or six years closer

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00:05:31,009 --> 00:05:32,009

to retirement.

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00:05:32,009 --> 00:05:35,559

But that's how the story goes sometimes.

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00:05:35,559 --> 00:05:42,950

And so you spoke about being hired by NASA in 2001 was not initially something you aspire

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00:05:42,950 --> 00:05:45,240

to.

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00:05:45,240 --> 00:05:47,840

What was it like when you were first hired?

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00:05:47,840 --> 00:05:49,809

Did you feel like you're a part of the NASA family?

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00:05:49,809 --> 00:05:55,380

And how did the feeling then compare to where you are now and the feeling that you have

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00:05:55,380 --> 00:05:56,490

now?

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00:05:56,490 --> 00:06:02,650

Yeah, I always felt like I was part of the NASA family because I already knew people

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00:06:02,650 --> 00:06:04,669

before I got here.

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00:06:04,669 --> 00:06:09,969

And so as I mentioned, there were some folks who I worked with during my internship that

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00:06:09,969 --> 00:06:12,289
was still here, thankfully.

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00:06:12,289 --> 00:06:19,199
And so it was an easy transition for me in
terms of the people.

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00:06:19,199 --> 00:06:25,800
Now, it wasn't so much an easy transition
in terms of the work, because I was used to

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00:06:25,800 --> 00:06:31,411
working with companies where the focus was
making money, and with the government, that's

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00:06:31,411 --> 00:06:34,990
not the focus.

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00:06:34,990 --> 00:06:38,749
And so that took a little bit of an adjustment
period for me.

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00:06:38,749 --> 00:06:45,979
But having those people and those connections
that I had already really helped me to get

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00:06:45,979 --> 00:06:48,289
into a groove here at NASA.

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00:06:48,289 --> 00:06:54,729
And in a lot of ways, it's very similar today
as it was then.

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00:06:54,729 --> 00:07:00,330
I've known a lot of folks, I knew a lot of
folks then and they're still here.

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00:07:00,330 --> 00:07:04,729
Some of them are getting ready to retire,
their hair's getting a little grayer and whatnot.

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00:07:04,729 --> 00:07:09,979

And a lot of the management looks the same.

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00:07:09,979 --> 00:07:13,289

You could say that that's consistency or you can say we still got a little room to grow

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00:07:13,289 --> 00:07:14,289

in that area.

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00:07:14,289 --> 00:07:15,289

I choose the latter.

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00:07:15,289 --> 00:07:29,030

But overall, the feeling of togetherness and family is pretty similar for me now in relation

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00:07:29,030 --> 00:07:30,030

to when it was then.

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00:07:30,030 --> 00:07:35,620

So not much has changed in that area for me.

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00:07:35,620 --> 00:07:41,229

You threw out several names of people who inspired you past and present, and some of

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00:07:41,229 --> 00:07:43,180

them are on this monitor wall behind us.

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00:07:43,180 --> 00:07:44,180

Yeah.

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00:07:44,180 --> 00:07:50,879

Can you dive a little deeper into what it was, what were the specific traits that some

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00:07:50,879 --> 00:07:55,349

of these people had that made you feel inspired to go farther?

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00:07:55,349 --> 00:07:57,030

I know you feel...

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00:07:57,030 --> 00:08:01,020

We've talked about NASA having some room for improvement.

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00:08:01,020 --> 00:08:06,180

What were the things about these individuals that really made you feel inspired to do more?

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00:08:06,180 --> 00:08:10,430

Well just how they conducted themselves.

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00:08:10,430 --> 00:08:13,960

Whenever I asked them for help, they were always there to help me.

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00:08:13,960 --> 00:08:19,979

Delores Abraham, who is up here on this wall, I could call her at any time of day, any day

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00:08:19,979 --> 00:08:25,649

of the week and ask her a question about something and she would be there to help me.

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00:08:25,649 --> 00:08:28,699

Now, I always owed her after the fact now.

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00:08:28,699 --> 00:08:35,729

I didn't always pay it, but she was always there, never denied me one iota of her time

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00:08:35,729 --> 00:08:37,399

or her effort.

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00:08:37,399 --> 00:08:43,080

And so those types of people inspire me, the people that I just mentioned a second ago,

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00:08:43,080 --> 00:08:45,400

and many others, folks that I work with today.

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00:08:45,400 --> 00:08:52,280

I'm always looking at each of those individuals to see what they do well and I try to incorporate

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00:08:52,280 --> 00:09:00,470

that into my attitude and my going about business of being who I am.

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00:09:00,470 --> 00:09:06,220

And I also look at people to see what not to do as well and make sure I don't incorporate

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00:09:06,220 --> 00:09:07,500

that.

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00:09:07,500 --> 00:09:10,930

But those are the folks that inspire me.

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00:09:10,930 --> 00:09:11,930

And also my family.

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00:09:11,930 --> 00:09:15,430

I want to make sure I do well for them.

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00:09:15,430 --> 00:09:18,120

I want to make sure that I'm making them proud.

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00:09:18,120 --> 00:09:22,690

I want to make sure that the people who believed in me here at NASA, who hired me and the folks

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00:09:22,690 --> 00:09:27,340

who are my official and unofficial mentors
here are proud of me.

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00:09:27,340 --> 00:09:29,010

So those are the folks that inspire me.

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00:09:29,010 --> 00:09:34,390

And all these people inspire me because I
know that they had a tough road to get to

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00:09:34,390 --> 00:09:35,390

where they are.

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00:09:35,390 --> 00:09:39,260

So they are an inspiration for me as well.

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00:09:39,260 --> 00:09:43,480

I listen to you speak, and I'm going to bring
up something that I know strikes a nerve for

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00:09:43,480 --> 00:09:48,180

a lot of people, but I feel like we can't
really have a conversation about Black History

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00:09:48,180 --> 00:09:51,200

Month without acknowledging this.

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00:09:51,200 --> 00:09:57,410

In the aftermath of the George Floyd tragedy
last year, there was turmoil around the country.

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00:09:57,410 --> 00:10:02,080

We here at NASA, we're getting ready to launch
the first Americans back into space from U.S.

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00:10:02,080 --> 00:10:10,000

soil in almost a decade, it was really a lot
of ups and downs last year for a lot of people.

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00:10:10,000 --> 00:10:11,000

Mm-hmm.

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00:10:11,000 --> 00:10:12,650

And a lot of that we're still experiencing.

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00:10:12,650 --> 00:10:19,470

And I know that across the agency, we had a lot of small group conversations where people

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00:10:19,470 --> 00:10:26,350

could just listen to each other, no judgment, no taking political sides, just let's just

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00:10:26,350 --> 00:10:27,600

talk.

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00:10:27,600 --> 00:10:33,280

And in one of those conversations, I listened to you in a small group of people from the

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00:10:33,280 --> 00:10:34,460

Commercial Crew Program.

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00:10:34,460 --> 00:10:39,800

And I was struck by your words.

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00:10:39,800 --> 00:10:46,140

They really had an impact on me and that's part of the reason I wanted to reach out to

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00:10:46,140 --> 00:10:47,270

you today.

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00:10:47,270 --> 00:10:51,450

How did you feel speaking out in that group about the way that that incident and other

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00:10:51,450 --> 00:10:58,720

incidents you've experienced have shaped how you show up in NASA and in the world?

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00:10:58,720 --> 00:11:03,390

And do you think those conversations have been helpful?

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00:11:03,390 --> 00:11:05,000

Do we need to do more of them?

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00:11:05,000 --> 00:11:09,220

Just want to get your take now that we've had some time to reflect.

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00:11:09,220 --> 00:11:10,900

Yeah.

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00:11:10,900 --> 00:11:12,950

We definitely need more of them.

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00:11:12,950 --> 00:11:16,410

I will touch on the other question first.

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00:11:16,410 --> 00:11:25,240

And that is that I always try to carry myself in the best light possible because I know

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00:11:25,240 --> 00:11:32,940

that I not only represent myself, I represent a whole swath of other people, either fairly

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00:11:32,940 --> 00:11:34,730

or unfairly.

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00:11:34,730 --> 00:11:40,110

And that's just the times and the situations that we live in.

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00:11:40,110 --> 00:11:50,880

And so I have to be very careful not to offend
or not to make mistakes or not to go sideways

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00:11:50,880 --> 00:11:53,000

in a conversation, or what have you.

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00:11:53,000 --> 00:11:54,640

And that's a big burden to bear.

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00:11:54,640 --> 00:11:59,140

And a lot folks like me have to bear that
burden and other folks don't have to bear

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00:11:59,140 --> 00:12:00,140

that burden.

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00:12:00,140 --> 00:12:01,480

That's just a fact.

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00:12:01,480 --> 00:12:11,070

And so what I try to do is just make sure
I stay as smart as I can, as honest and as

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00:12:11,070 --> 00:12:18,160

inviting as I can so that I can help to touch
back on the subject of family, expand that

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00:12:18,160 --> 00:12:22,320

NASA family and make sure everybody feels
included.

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00:12:22,320 --> 00:12:29,480

We do need to have more of these conversations
and these conversations will be fruitful if

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00:12:29,480 --> 00:12:36,670

you have people who are fair, if they are
truly genuine people.

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00:12:36,670 --> 00:12:41,710

If you don't have people like that, then these conversations are not going to be successful

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00:12:41,710 --> 00:12:42,710

at all.

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00:12:42,710 --> 00:12:44,620

And there are some people out there like that.

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00:12:44,620 --> 00:12:51,600

So we have to figure out a way to move around those people and get to folks like you and

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00:12:51,600 --> 00:12:57,390

other folks that I know who are more in the middle and more moderate in their thinking,

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00:12:57,390 --> 00:13:02,560

and try to expand that base a little bit so that we can continue to make progress.

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00:13:02,560 --> 00:13:09,360

We've been having these problems since the Niña, the Pinta and the Santa María got

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00:13:09,360 --> 00:13:10,360

here.

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00:13:10,360 --> 00:13:13,140

That's a long, long time.

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00:13:13,140 --> 00:13:18,940

And so we've been having these starting conversations for many years, and it's time to end these

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00:13:18,940 --> 00:13:19,940

conversations.

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00:13:19,940 --> 00:13:25,920

We need to start moving at a rocket's pace and not a snail's pace anymore.

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00:13:25,920 --> 00:13:31,580

And the things that I saw last year, to be honest with you, I'd never thought that I

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00:13:31,580 --> 00:13:33,980

would see in my lifetime.

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00:13:33,980 --> 00:13:38,600

I mean there were more people out there marching and protesting.

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00:13:38,600 --> 00:13:43,980

I'm not for the extracurricular stuff that was going on, but there were a lot of people

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00:13:43,980 --> 00:13:46,590

who look like you who are out there.

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00:13:46,590 --> 00:13:49,720

And so I never thought I'd see that in my lifetime.

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00:13:49,720 --> 00:13:53,900

And so that's encouraging, and I have hope for the future.

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00:13:53,900 --> 00:13:57,890

And I just hope that all of the right folks are involved in the conversation so that we

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00:13:57,890 --> 00:14:03,670

can move this agenda or conversation forward even more.

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00:14:03,670 --> 00:14:04,670

What does that look like?

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00:14:04,670 --> 00:14:09,400

I mean you talked about the conversations are helpful, but they only go so far.

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00:14:09,400 --> 00:14:10,400

Right.

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00:14:10,400 --> 00:14:16,330

How do we, as an agency, continue to embrace diversity and inclusion as a core value?

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00:14:16,330 --> 00:14:19,330

Well you have to do it, right?

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00:14:19,330 --> 00:14:25,570

It's one thing to talk about it and to pacify someone about it so that they can stop talking

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00:14:25,570 --> 00:14:31,380

about it for a time being, but you have no intentions on enacting any change.

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00:14:31,380 --> 00:14:38,480

We have to be about the business of recognizing folks like me and others.

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00:14:38,480 --> 00:14:45,070

We have to be about the business of not only hiring these people, but then also actively

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00:14:45,070 --> 00:14:48,220

promoting these people.

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00:14:48,220 --> 00:14:49,950

It takes all phases, all right?

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00:14:49,950 --> 00:14:56,880

It's one thing to say I've interviewed 20 African-Americans, but I didn't hire any of

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00:14:56,880 --> 00:14:57,880
them.

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00:14:57,880 --> 00:14:59,630
Then what good is that?

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00:14:59,630 --> 00:15:01,010
That serves no purpose.

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00:15:01,010 --> 00:15:03,800
And so that's how you advance the agenda.

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00:15:03,800 --> 00:15:08,210
Folks like me, and I'm just speaking for folks like me, there is a whole swath of people

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00:15:08,210 --> 00:15:10,260
out there who are misrepresented.

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00:15:10,260 --> 00:15:15,500
But for folks like me, we are just as capable of doing the job.

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00:15:15,500 --> 00:15:16,530
We can do the job.

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00:15:16,530 --> 00:15:24,180
We can speak articulately, we can handle meetings, we can do the technical stuff.

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00:15:24,180 --> 00:15:29,680
We just need not only the opportunity, but the actual selection to do the job.

232

00:15:29,680 --> 00:15:35,850
And so it's going to take folks like you to

say, "Okay, we got to make this a more perfect

233

00:15:35,850 --> 00:15:41,220

union," and this is how we can start doing that.

234

00:15:41,220 --> 00:15:45,820

My last question for you, and I think you've kind of already answered it, but I don't know

235

00:15:45,820 --> 00:15:52,540

if you want to expand on this, is how are you working to try to empower the next generation

236

00:15:52,540 --> 00:15:57,350

of explorers, black explorers and everybody else who wants to be part of the NASA family

237

00:15:57,350 --> 00:16:01,279

who wants to explore and go farther than we've ever gone before?

238

00:16:01,279 --> 00:16:07,850

I try to tell people that you don't have to be an astronaut or an engineer to work at

239

00:16:07,850 --> 00:16:09,529

NASA.

240

00:16:09,529 --> 00:16:13,910

You can be a doctor, you can be a lawyer, you can be an architect, you can be a graphics

241

00:16:13,910 --> 00:16:14,910

person.

242

00:16:14,910 --> 00:16:20,070

You can be someone who can handle conferences and that sort of thing.

243

00:16:20,070 --> 00:16:23,870

You can be someone who understands contracts.

244

00:16:23,870 --> 00:16:31,860

And so I think if you open it up to that,
then you will get more people interested and

245

00:16:31,860 --> 00:16:38,340

feel that they can be a part of NASA and contribute
to the missions of NASA.

246

00:16:38,340 --> 00:16:42,940

Another big thing that I enjoy that NASA does
is bring your kids to work day.

247

00:16:42,940 --> 00:16:45,800

And so I brought my kids out here and they
loved it.

248

00:16:45,800 --> 00:16:49,070

And they always ask me, "When can we go again?"

249

00:16:49,070 --> 00:16:51,070

I say, "We can't go now, all right?"

250

00:16:51,070 --> 00:16:55,090

Not right now,
But that is a thing that can inspire the next

251

00:16:55,090 --> 00:16:57,880

generation of folks as well.

252

00:16:57,880 --> 00:17:03,160

And then I have people all the time who ask
me how they can get on with NASA.

253

00:17:03,160 --> 00:17:06,860

And I talk about the pathways, program, et
cetera.

254

00:17:06,860 --> 00:17:15,770

And so those are ways, it may be a conversation in a grocery store or in a shopping area,

255

00:17:15,770 --> 00:17:16,910

what have you.

256

00:17:16,910 --> 00:17:22,410

And that's how you can inspire the next generation of explorers.

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00:17:22,410 --> 00:17:26,850

And I think NASA makes the job easy, all right?

258

00:17:26,850 --> 00:17:32,260

Because what we do out here is good stuff that people want to be involved with and want

259

00:17:32,260 --> 00:17:33,630

to be a part of.

260

00:17:33,630 --> 00:17:38,080

So we don't have to do that much selling, right?

261

00:17:38,080 --> 00:17:43,790

And in the name of, I know I said it was my last question, but I do have one more, as

262

00:17:43,790 --> 00:17:50,040

we're sitting here with these, these remarkable people behind us, and this is obviously a

263

00:17:50,040 --> 00:17:58,250

tiny, tiny sampling of the people who have literally blazed a trail, what haven't I asked

264

00:17:58,250 --> 00:18:00,180

about that you want to talk about?

265

00:18:00,180 --> 00:18:05,820

Because if you remember, when I first approached you about having this conversation, it really

266

00:18:05,820 --> 00:18:13,540

struck me that you said, "Nobody's ever asked me before what I think about this," and it

267

00:18:13,540 --> 00:18:16,660

made me sad that you'd never been asked.

268

00:18:16,660 --> 00:18:22,550

So I want to give you the opportunity to share if there's something that I haven't asked

269

00:18:22,550 --> 00:18:26,980

about that you think is really important for people to know about Black History Month and

270

00:18:26,980 --> 00:18:28,760

your experience.

271

00:18:28,760 --> 00:18:29,850

Well thank you for that.

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00:18:29,850 --> 00:18:33,240

And it may not seem like it, but I am an introvert.

273

00:18:33,240 --> 00:18:36,370

It may not seem like it after this interview here, but I am.

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00:18:36,370 --> 00:18:39,660

But thank you for this opportunity.

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00:18:39,660 --> 00:18:49,230

I would just say thank you to those folks

who overwhelmingly look like you who are trying

276

00:18:49,230 --> 00:18:54,140

really hard to do the right thing, and those
that are doing the right thing.

277

00:18:54,140 --> 00:18:56,800

I don't think you guys get enough credit.

278

00:18:56,800 --> 00:19:04,710

So I want to just make sure that you know
that I see you, I acknowledge you and I thank

279

00:19:04,710 --> 00:19:05,710

you.

280

00:19:05,710 --> 00:19:07,000

And keep doing what you're doing.

281

00:19:07,000 --> 00:19:12,510

You have my backing and my support for what
that's worth.

282

00:19:12,510 --> 00:19:14,900

Well I appreciate that.

283

00:19:14,900 --> 00:19:16,090

Thank you for those words.

284

00:19:16,090 --> 00:19:24,920

I would also like to take this opportunity
to thank some people, my parents, my grandparents,

285

00:19:24,920 --> 00:19:35,400

my great-grandparents, and all of my relatives
who survived slavery and Jim Crow to allow

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00:19:35,400 --> 00:19:38,480

me to be here today.

287

00:19:38,480 --> 00:19:42,430

And I've never publicly acknowledged them before, but those are my true heroes.

288

00:19:42,430 --> 00:19:44,430

They should be all on this board here.

289

00:19:44,430 --> 00:19:47,440

They're all on my mental board.

290

00:19:47,440 --> 00:19:57,190

And my great, great, great grandfather, his name was Isaac, was a slave.

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00:19:57,190 --> 00:20:01,270

And I often wonder what he would think of me today.

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00:20:01,270 --> 00:20:07,350

And so I hope, I can only hope, that I am making him proud, because I know I'm a far

293

00:20:07,350 --> 00:20:14,900

away dream from what he thought as a young kid or as a young man.

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00:20:14,900 --> 00:20:23,810

And then finally, I will talk about, I will speak to the people who think that folks like

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00:20:23,810 --> 00:20:28,400

me complain too much, or there are no issues or no problems.

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00:20:28,400 --> 00:20:33,090

And I would offer a scenario to these people.

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00:20:33,090 --> 00:20:42,250

And that scenario is let's trade places and let me tell you what that would mean.

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00:20:42,250 --> 00:20:52,050

That would mean people like me would control the financial system, control the legal system.

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00:20:52,050 --> 00:20:54,330

We get to make the laws.

300

00:20:54,330 --> 00:21:00,000

We get to control the school systems to determine who gets suspended or expelled.

301

00:21:00,000 --> 00:21:03,920

We get to control the judicial system.

302

00:21:03,920 --> 00:21:11,490

And I will share a story with you, I'll share the story that I shared briefly when we had

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00:21:11,490 --> 00:21:13,050

the tag up there.

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00:21:13,050 --> 00:21:21,730

I can remember four Caucasian police officers in 1989, I said 1988 when I told the story

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00:21:21,730 --> 00:21:30,350

before, but it was actually in 1989, had an average sized African-American woman in handcuffs.

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00:21:30,350 --> 00:21:35,330

She wasn't yelling, she wasn't screaming, she wasn't disrespectful.

307

00:21:35,330 --> 00:21:39,130

The one police officer who didn't have on a uniform, he had on all brown, he was the

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00:21:39,130 --> 00:21:43,310

biggest one so I'm assuming he was the chief
or the sheriff.

309

00:21:43,310 --> 00:21:48,710

As he was putting her in the police car, he
just indiscriminately started beating her

310

00:21:48,710 --> 00:21:50,760

in the head and in the face.

311

00:21:50,760 --> 00:21:51,840

She didn't do anything.

312

00:21:51,840 --> 00:21:55,690

She's handcuffed and she's a woman.

313

00:21:55,690 --> 00:21:59,940

And my heart sank that day and I was very
angry.

314

00:21:59,940 --> 00:22:03,550

And when she left the parking lot, I have
no idea what happened to that woman after

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00:22:03,550 --> 00:22:04,970

she left the parking lot.

316

00:22:04,970 --> 00:22:07,040

But I know nothing good happened to her.

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00:22:07,040 --> 00:22:12,360

And I can guarantee you 100% that nothing
happened to those police officers.

318

00:22:12,360 --> 00:22:14,200

Absolutely nothing.

319

00:22:14,200 --> 00:22:21,820

Just imagine for a moment that those situations
or that situation was reversed.

320

00:22:21,820 --> 00:22:23,070

Just imagine.

321

00:22:23,070 --> 00:22:30,180

But on the flip side, we'll give you guys
affirmative action.

322

00:22:30,180 --> 00:22:37,010

You can be Beyonce, you can be LeBron James,
you can be Michael Jackson, you can be Oprah

323

00:22:37,010 --> 00:22:39,350

Winfrey.

324

00:22:39,350 --> 00:22:47,860

You can also be Martin Luther King, Medgar
Evers, Jimmy Lee Jackson, the four little

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00:22:47,860 --> 00:22:53,010

girls in Birmingham at the 16th Street Baptist
Church.

326

00:22:53,010 --> 00:22:55,110

You could be Willy Edwards.

327

00:22:55,110 --> 00:22:57,590

You could be Jimmy Lee Jackson.

328

00:22:57,590 --> 00:23:01,040

You could be Willie James Harmon.

329

00:23:01,040 --> 00:23:02,990

And if you don't know any of these people,
that's okay.

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00:23:02,990 --> 00:23:06,850

You can Google and look up the stuff that they went through.

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00:23:06,850 --> 00:23:12,770

And if you can look at that with a pure mind and a pure heart and say you would be okay

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00:23:12,770 --> 00:23:16,550

with that, then I don't know what to say.

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00:23:16,550 --> 00:23:21,770

I would argue that 0% of people would be okay with that stuff happening to them.

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00:23:21,770 --> 00:23:27,130

And so if you're not okay with that stuff happening to you, then why do you think we

335

00:23:27,130 --> 00:23:32,190

are okay with this stuff happening to us?

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00:23:32,190 --> 00:23:33,630

We live in a great country.

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00:23:33,630 --> 00:23:35,480

This is the greatest country in the world.

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00:23:35,480 --> 00:23:36,740

I believe that.

339

00:23:36,740 --> 00:23:43,660

We live at NASA, or we work at NASA, which is one the greatest places on earth to work.

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00:23:43,660 --> 00:23:48,770

I will say that we still have a lot of room to grow in terms of diversity.

341

00:23:48,770 --> 00:23:56,380

All we're asking is for the same things that everyone else has, nothing more, nothing less.

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00:23:56,380 --> 00:24:07,440

Far too often, we deal in the realm of three worlds, which is the objective world, the

343

00:24:07,440 --> 00:24:11,740

subjective world and the personal story world.

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00:24:11,740 --> 00:24:15,130

And all of those worlds have some merit.

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00:24:15,130 --> 00:24:19,170

But far too often, folks like me get lumped into that subjective world.

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00:24:19,170 --> 00:24:20,950

And it's always a yeah, but.

347

00:24:20,950 --> 00:24:23,770

Yeah, but, yeah, but, yeah, but, yeah, but.

348

00:24:23,770 --> 00:24:25,530

And that's just not right.

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00:24:25,530 --> 00:24:30,510

And so we've all seen some things and gone through some things and had to maneuver our

350

00:24:30,510 --> 00:24:36,130

way around certain scenarios here at NASA, but we shouldn't have to.

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00:24:36,130 --> 00:24:44,070

Some people get to walk right through the front door, no inhibitors, no barriers, no

352

00:24:44,070 --> 00:24:45,070

nothing.

353

00:24:45,070 --> 00:24:48,880

Some people get to walk to the front door
and stand for a moment and then they get let

354

00:24:48,880 --> 00:24:50,360

in.

355

00:24:50,360 --> 00:24:57,060

And then other folks have to find the door,
then they have to navigate landmines and barbed

356

00:24:57,060 --> 00:25:02,730

wire fences and get through the molten lava,
and then slay the dragon and then get to the

357

00:25:02,730 --> 00:25:06,929

front door which is reinforced by 10 inch
thick steel.

358

00:25:06,929 --> 00:25:15,380

And then if we get through that, then we might
achieve what we set out to achieve.

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00:25:15,380 --> 00:25:22,410

And so the final points I will make is that
I've heard that diversity compromises the

360

00:25:22,410 --> 00:25:23,980

mission.

361

00:25:23,980 --> 00:25:27,150

That's the most outlandish thing that I've
ever heard.

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00:25:27,150 --> 00:25:30,610

If anything, diversity enhances the mission.

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00:25:30,610 --> 00:25:36,320

And so I hear people all the time say, "Well life isn't fair."

364

00:25:38,770 --> 00:25:37,540

I agree.

365

00:25:38,770 --> 00:25:42,740

But it's unfair because people make it unfair.

366

00:25:42,740 --> 00:25:47,260

It's not some nebulous thing that's just floating around touching people saying, "Your life

367

00:25:49,260 --> 00:25:48,260

is fair.

368

00:25:51,260 --> 00:25:50,260

Your life is unfair.

369

00:25:51,260 --> 00:25:52,730

No, it's people doing this.

370

00:25:52,730 --> 00:26:00,000

And so I will reiterate this again, is that I've met a lot of awesome people here at NASA.

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00:26:00,000 --> 00:26:01,500

A lot of them don't look like me.

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00:26:01,500 --> 00:26:12,070

I've met people from Haiti, from Jamaica, from Panama, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Chicago, New

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00:26:12,070 --> 00:26:16,650

York, Los Angeles, Alabama, Georgia.

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00:26:16,650 --> 00:26:22,980

And so it's going to take those right minded people, those people who have goodness in

375

00:26:22,980 --> 00:26:25,490

them, all right?

376

00:26:25,490 --> 00:26:30,830

And they're going to have to just be a little more bolder with their goodness because good

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00:26:30,830 --> 00:26:34,000

is the only thing that can drive out hate.

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00:26:34,000 --> 00:26:37,470

And we say that all the time, but that's a true statement.

379

00:26:37,470 --> 00:26:42,440

And so if we all collectively, because we're all related, right?

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00:26:42,440 --> 00:26:46,690

If you believe in the good book, we're all related.

381

00:26:46,690 --> 00:26:48,559

We all come from Noah.

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00:26:48,559 --> 00:26:53,220

And I know that we sometimes fight with one another, but we're still family, back to the

383

00:26:53,220 --> 00:26:56,260

NASA family theme.

384

00:26:56,260 --> 00:27:03,390

And so we just need to make sure that we see each other, that we hear each other, and that

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00:27:03,390 --> 00:27:11,530

we acknowledge each other and spend more time to confirm, confirm, confirm, as opposed to

386

00:27:11,530 --> 00:27:14,350

deny, deny, deny.

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00:27:14,350 --> 00:27:20,430

And I guarantee you, if we do that, this place, which is already awesome, will be a much better

388

00:27:20,430 --> 00:27:22,200

place.

389

00:27:22,200 --> 00:27:23,470

I guarantee it.

390

00:27:23,470 --> 00:27:26,140

Thank you so much, Shel.

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00:27:26,140 --> 00:27:27,140

Really appreciate your time.

392

00:27:27,140 --> 00:27:28,140

Powerful words.

393

00:27:30,140 --> 00:27:29,140

Thank you.

394

00:27:30,140 --> 00:27:31,670

Thank you all for having me.

395

00:27:31,670 --> 00:27:37,290

A special thanks to Sheldon Lauderdale, Program Analyst for NASA's Commercial Crew Program.

396

00:27:37,290 --> 00:27:44,070

To learn more about everything going on at the Kennedy Space Center, go to nasa.gov/kennedy.

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00:27:44,070 --> 00:27:48,290

And if you'd like to find out what's happening
at our other NASA centers around the country,

398

00:27:48,290 --> 00:27:49,290

go to nasa.gov/podcasts.

399

00:27:49,290 --> 00:27:57,340

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