



Who has inspired you the most in Black History and why?

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00:00:00,300 --> 00:00:01,835

Hi, I'm Malik Thompson, an

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00:00:01,835 --> 00:00:04,471

airspace materials engineer at NASA's
Marshall Space Flight Center.

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00:00:04,704 --> 00:00:07,640

And here we're celebrating
National Engineer's Week and Black History

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00:00:07,640 --> 00:00:13,747

Month.

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00:00:13,747 --> 00:00:15,081

So it started in seventh grade.

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00:00:15,081 --> 00:00:17,250

And at the time we were doing
like a career event

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00:00:17,250 --> 00:00:20,453

where they sent us home and told us
to plan out our whole lives, everything

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00:00:20,453 --> 00:00:22,355

from where we might live to the job
we might have.

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00:00:22,355 --> 00:00:25,091

And at the time,
I thought I wanted to be a paleontologist.

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00:00:25,091 --> 00:00:29,229

And then when I got into the details,
I was like, maybe that's not quite for me.

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00:00:29,229 --> 00:00:33,033

So it was actually one of my parents

suggested that I start looking based

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00:00:33,033 --> 00:00:37,370

on my experience and love for science
fiction into something to do with space.

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00:00:37,370 --> 00:00:38,872

And that's when I decided that

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00:00:38,872 --> 00:00:40,974

I wanted to be an engineer,
to help be a part of the space game

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00:00:43,543 --> 00:00:44,144

From day to day.

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00:00:44,144 --> 00:00:44,944

It feels like it.

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00:00:44,944 --> 00:00:47,881

It changes sometimes because I work
a lot of different programs and projects.

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00:00:47,881 --> 00:00:50,050

I'm always hungry
for the next thing over the horizon,

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00:00:50,350 --> 00:00:51,151

but for the most part,

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00:00:51,151 --> 00:00:55,088

as an aerospace materials engineer,
I work with the planning and production

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00:00:55,321 --> 00:00:57,891

of different spacecraft
and launch vehicles

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00:00:58,091 --> 00:01:00,827

in order to get them into space
and make sure that they're space worthy.

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00:01:01,294 --> 00:01:04,431

So for Artemis
and for the Commercial Crew program,

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00:01:04,597 --> 00:01:07,867

I'm primarily focused on launch vehicles
and in my case,

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00:01:08,101 --> 00:01:10,437

the thermal protection systems
that go into protecting

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00:01:10,437 --> 00:01:17,377

both the propellants as well as
the structures that they're made of.

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00:01:17,377 --> 00:01:20,246

So it goes without saying that there's a
lot of challenges in the work that we do.

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00:01:20,280 --> 00:01:22,482

Space is difficult.

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00:01:22,749 --> 00:01:26,219

President Kennedy said it in the sixties,
and we're living it now.

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00:01:26,419 --> 00:01:28,421

But that's not where it ends

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00:01:28,421 --> 00:01:30,957

because there are a lot of us
that are passionate about what we do.

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00:01:31,124 --> 00:01:33,693

So those challenges
become that much smaller because of it.

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00:01:34,160 --> 00:01:36,396

And then so far as the rewards go,

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00:01:36,396 --> 00:01:40,300

I think a lot about how my little brother
and sister, they have always lived

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00:01:40,300 --> 00:01:43,303

in a world where people have been living
and working in space,

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00:01:43,703 --> 00:01:47,207

and now I get to be a part of
what the next generation will experience

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00:01:47,207 --> 00:01:52,645

so far as having people actively living
and working on the moon permanently

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00:01:52,979 --> 00:01:59,085

and that makes it
that much more worthwhile.

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00:01:59,085 --> 00:02:03,223

It's important because NASA
as a government agency, should resemble

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00:02:03,256 --> 00:02:07,460

the country that it represents and ensure
that we all have a seat at the table.

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00:02:07,460 --> 00:02:11,197

And diversity and inclusion are important,
but they're often

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00:02:11,197 --> 00:02:14,067

conflated with simply
just having people in a room.

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00:02:14,300 --> 00:02:17,170

And it goes beyond that
because Malcolm X said that

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00:02:17,170 --> 00:02:20,373

just because a person is sitting
at the table doesn't make them a diner

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00:02:20,673 --> 00:02:22,976

and we have to be able to eat
from that plate, too.

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00:02:23,443 --> 00:02:25,111

NASA does an amazing job.

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00:02:25,111 --> 00:02:28,248

We do a great job of making sure
that people are included,

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00:02:28,648 --> 00:02:30,483

but then also making sure
that they're a part of the team

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00:02:30,483 --> 00:02:32,852

and being able to contribute
in the best way that they can.

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00:02:33,286 --> 00:02:36,022

And it's important, too, for the future
that we gather people with disparate

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00:02:36,022 --> 00:02:39,592

backgrounds and ideas
to be able to get us to that common goal

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00:02:39,592 --> 00:02:47,167

because space isn't easy
and we need everybody on deck.

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00:02:47,167 --> 00:02:50,403

It's a twofold answer, really,
because at the beginning of it, it's

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00:02:50,403 --> 00:02:54,374

Nichelle Nichols, who played Lieutenant
Okura in the Star Trek TV series.

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00:02:54,707 --> 00:02:56,910

And at that point,
there had been very many

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00:02:56,910 --> 00:03:00,980

African-American women who starred in TV
shows that weren't in subservient roles.

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00:03:00,980 --> 00:03:04,317

She was an active member of the crew
that contributed a lot of technical

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00:03:04,317 --> 00:03:08,221

knowledge and experience, and they valued
her for it, much like I do now at NASA.

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00:03:08,655 --> 00:03:11,324

And then because of that work,
she was invited to Johnson Space

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00:03:11,324 --> 00:03:14,460

Center to be able
to see the everyday work at NASA.

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00:03:14,561 --> 00:03:16,896

And when she saw that,
she realized that there weren't

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00:03:16,896 --> 00:03:19,866

very many people of color, people
that looked like her that were around.

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00:03:20,133 --> 00:03:22,202

And so she decided
to do something about it.

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00:03:22,202 --> 00:03:25,171

And when she did, she traveled the country
for months in order to recruit

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00:03:25,438 --> 00:03:28,174

women and people of color
to apply to be astronauts.

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00:03:28,441 --> 00:03:32,045

And the class that followed
because of her work, was the most diverse

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00:03:32,045 --> 00:03:33,413

that had happened at that time.

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00:03:33,413 --> 00:03:37,217

So that class included Ronald McNair,
an African-American man from small town

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00:03:37,217 --> 00:03:39,018

South Carolina, just like myself.

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00:03:39,018 --> 00:03:42,255

And he grew up one hour away
from the dirt road that I grew up in.

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00:03:42,589 --> 00:03:45,391

So that showed me above all else
that I could do it, too.

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00:03:45,658 --> 00:03:50,330

And I could be a part of NASA's.

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00:03:50,330 --> 00:03:53,366

It's interesting, I actually just recently
did an outreach event with high school

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00:03:53,366 --> 00:03:57,303

students, and I was telling them
this very same thing we're in.

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00:03:57,303 --> 00:04:00,907

It's a matter of always persevere,
no matter how hard things get,

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00:04:01,307 --> 00:04:04,143

no matter how difficult things may seem,
you're never alone.

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00:04:04,611 --> 00:04:08,281

The most important part about STEM
is peer review and being on a team.

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00:04:08,715 --> 00:04:10,049

So you're never really alone

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00:04:10,049 --> 00:04:13,653

and you're never really up
against the whole hurdle by yourself.

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00:04:14,153 --> 00:04:17,156

But you always have people to call on
whether they're professors in school

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00:04:17,390 --> 00:04:21,327

or coworkers and team members
in the workplace, in the workplace.

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00:04:21,327 --> 00:04:25,331

It's important to keep in mind
that you're not ever above anything

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00:04:25,331 --> 00:04:26,032

and you're not below

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00:04:26,032 --> 00:04:30,336

anything that there's work
that at one point may seem like, you know,

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00:04:30,370 --> 00:04:32,872

you're not doing the most
if you feel like you can,

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00:04:33,006 --> 00:04:35,174

but you never know what might come in
handy later on.

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00:04:35,408 --> 00:04:37,910

And by the same token, you yourself
have something

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00:04:38,144 --> 00:04:41,881

very significant to contribute
that only you can contribute.

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00:04:42,382 --> 00:04:46,386

So you owe it to yourself
and to everyone that you're working