

Joan Higginbotham

Retired NASA Astronaut, Rocket Scientist, Electrical Engineer, & Third African American Woman in Space

A retired NASA astronaut, Joan Higginbotham is a trailblazing electrical engineer, who in December 2006, flew aboard Space Shuttle Discovery to become the third African American woman to travel into space. On the nearly 13-day mission, the seven-member crew continued construction of the International Space Station (ISS), embarking on four space walks with Higginbotham operating the station's robotic arm.

Exclusively represented by [Leading Authorities speakers bureau](#), Higginbotham utilizes the International Space Station as the backdrop for sharing insights and lessons learned during her 20-year distinguished career with NASA, while inspiring and captivating audiences with her personal journey of breaking barriers to boldly go where few have gone: space. In doing so, she highlights the keys to succeeding in her missions – including seizing opportunities, being prepared, perseverance, working with diverse teams, and thriving in demanding, high-stakes environments – as well as how these tactics can be applied to any endeavor.

A real-life rocket scientist, Higginbotham began her career at NASA in 1987 as an aerospace technologist at the Kennedy Space Center (KSC), Florida, where she worked her way through numerous promotions and actively participated in 53 space shuttle launches during her 9-year tenure. Selected as an astronaut candidate by NASA in 1996, she reported to the Johnson Space Center and was assigned various technical duties including testing modules of the ISS for operability, compatibility, and functionality prior to launch. Higginbotham has logged more than 308 hours in space, retiring in 2007 after 20 years with NASA, joining Marathon Oil to manage their corporate social responsibility office and the Bioko Island Malaria Control Program in Equatorial Guinea, Africa.

Higginbotham has had a storied career, serving as director of open innovation at Collins Aerospace, sourcing cutting-edge technologies to close current technology gaps and meet future technology needs. Prior to that role, Higginbotham managed the relationships with governmental agencies and public and private companies involved in human space exploration and also served as director of corporate social responsibility. Preceding her time at Collins Aerospace, she held multiple director positions at Lowe's Companies, Inc., leading their community relations, supplier diversity, and global sourcing efforts. In April 2022, she stepped out on faith, resigned from corporate America, and launched her own aerospace consulting firm, Joan Higginbotham Ad Astra LLC.

Widely recognized for her accomplishments, Higginbotham has been honored by President George W. Bush at the 81st White House Black History Month Celebration, featured in Alicia Keys' *Superwoman* video, is the recipient of the National Space Medal, the Adler Planetarium Women in Space Award, and the NASA Exceptional Service Medal, and was named one of *Savoy Magazine's* Top Influential Women in Corporate America and one of *Essence Magazine's* Top 50 Women, among other accolades.

Born in Chicago, IL, Higginbotham received a Bachelor of Science Degree in Electrical Engineering from Southern Illinois University at Carbondale (SIU-C), a Master of Science Degree in Management from the Florida Institute of Technology (FIT), a Master of Science Degree in Space Systems from FIT, an Honorary Doctorate in Aerospace Science from SIU-C, and an Honorary Doctorate in Humanities from the University of New Orleans.