

Written by Patricia Turnier LL.M  
Friday, 04 January 2013 04:13

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Walking in the black vacuum, looking at the blue-white planet Earth more than two hundred miles below, would be a reverie for many children around the world. This dream became a reality for Dr. Bernard A. Harris Jr. on February 9, 1995 during Black History Month, when he glided out the gate of the space shuttle Discovery. This wonderful accomplishment made him the first [African-American](#) to walk in space. Actually, he flew on the space shuttle twice in the nineties. Dr. Harris' story is the epiphany of the American dream, an amazing upward

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socio-economical mobility.

**Dr. Bernard Anthony Harris, Jr. M.D., M.B.A., F.A.C.P** was born on June 26, 1956 in Temple, Texas. He grew up on the Navajo Nation during his formative years. Dr. Harris left the reserve later with his family and graduated from Sam Houston High School in San Antonio, Texas, in 1974, where he was actively involved in science fairs, book clubs and other academic activities. He obtained a B.S. degree in biology from University of Houston in 1978, and got his Doctorate of medicine (MD) degree from Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center School of Medicine in 1982. Dr. Harris did his residency in internal medicine at the Mayo Clinic in 1985. He later received a Master of Business Administration (MBA) from the University of Houston Clear Lake. The physician did a National Research Council Fellowship in Endocrinology at NASA's Ames Research Center in 1987.

In addition, Dr. Bernard Harris trained as a flight surgeon at the Aerospace School of Medicine at Brooks Air Force Base in San Antonio in 1988 and received a Master's Degree in biomedical science (MMS) from The University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston in 1996.

After completing his fellowship at NASA Ames, Dr. Harris enrolled in NASA's Johnson Space Center as a clinical scientist and flight surgeon, where he conducted clinical investigations of space adaptation and established countermeasures for extended duration space flight.

As mentioned, Dr. Harris journeyed into space twice. On his second mission he was the Payload Commander on STS-63 (2 February 1995 – 11 February 1995), the first flight of the new joint Russian-American Space Program. Mission highlights included the first rendezvous (but not docking) with the Russian space station Mir, and retrieval of the Spartan 204 satellite. During the aforementioned flight, Dr. Harris became the first African-American to walk in space – noteworthy it was also on this flight that Eileen Collins became the first female Shuttle pilot. On this mission, Dr. Harris flew 198 hours and 29 minutes in space, completed 129 orbits, and traveled over 2.9 million miles in total.

Dr. Harris left NASA in April 1996 and has pursued research. He occupied the position of Vice President of SPACEHAB, Inc., an innovative space commercialization company, where he conducted the company's space science business. He was also Vice President of Business Development for Space Media, Inc., an Informatics company, where he created an international space education programme for students and developed an e-commerce initiative that is now part of the United Nations education program.

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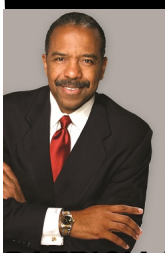
In addition to his experience as a medical doctor and [astronaut](#), Dr. Bernard Harris is the author and co-author of several scientific publications. He is the CEO and managing partner of Vesalius Ventures, a venture capital firm that focuses on new to mid-stage healthcare technologies and companies. Moreover, the physician has several faculty appointments, including Associate Professor in Internal Medicine at the University of Texas Medical Branch and Assistant Professor at Baylor College of Medicine. Hence, Dr. Harris is a philanthropist and a bold man who likes challenges. He won't sit on his laurels or won't stay in comfort zones. He served as the chief medical officer and payload commander, not to mention conducting a spacewalk.

Dr. Harris is a member of several professional, academic and service organizations: the American College of Physicians, Honor Society of Phi Kappa Phi, and Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, among others. He is a board member of the Boys and Girls Club of Houston, National Math and Science Initiative, Medical Informatics, Technology and Applications Center, Houston Technology Center, and the National Space Biomedical Research Institute, Board of Scientific Counselors. Furthermore, Dr. Harris was a Senior Consultant for the NASA Aerospace Safety Panel, a Member of the NASA Biological and Physical Sciences Committee, the Council for the National Institute Health/National Institute for Deafness, Texas Tech University Board of Regents, Texas Higher Education Coalition, Texas Commission on a Representative Student Body and Communications Disorders and the Committee for the National Academies Institute of Medicine.

Dr. Harris has been recognized many times by NASA and other organizations for his professional and academic achievements. In 1996, he received an honorary doctorate from the Morehouse College School of Medicine. He was granted after other honorary doctorates from Stonybrook University, New Jersey Institute of Technology, and the University of Houston. Moreover, he has earned a NASA Space flight medal, a NASA Award of Merit, a fellow of the American College of Physicians and the 2000 Horatio Alger Award. He was inducted into the Horatio Alger Association of Distinguished Americans. In 2005, the North East Independent School District of San Antonio, Texas named a middle school -- then under construction -- after Dr. Harris. The Bernard Harris Middle School opened August 14, 2006 with a capacity of 1500 students.

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THE GREAT TURNER IN TANKS TO DR. HARRIS MD

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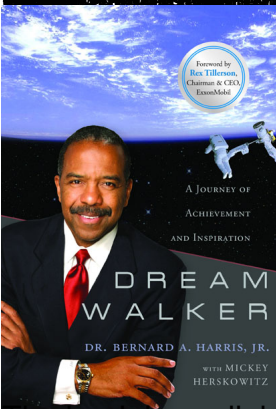


<http://www.theharrisfoundation.org/>



[www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org)

Dr. Bernard Harris MD, MSc, PhD, is a retired astronaut and physician. He is currently a professor of medicine at the University of Texas at Dallas.



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