

Ed Dwight

Edward Joseph (Ed) Dwight Jr. (born September 9, 1933) is an African-American sculptor and former test pilot who was the first African American to enter the Air Force training program from which NASA selected astronauts.

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Early life

Dwight was born in the Kansas City, Kansas, area on September 9, 1933, to Edward Dwight Sr. and Georgia Baker Dwight. His father played second base for the Kansas City Monarchs.^[1]

As a child, Dwight was an avid reader and talented artist who was mechanically gifted and enjoyed working with his hands.^[1] He attended grade school at Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Kansas City, Missouri. In 1951, he became the first African-American male to graduate from Bishop Ward High School, a private Roman Catholic high school in Kansas City, Kansas. He was a member of the National Honor Society and earned a scholarship to attend the Kansas City Art Institute.^{[2][3][4]} Dwight enrolled in Kansas City Junior College (later renamed Metropolitan Community College) and graduated with an Associate of Arts degree in Engineering in 1953.

Piloting

Dwight enlisted in the United States Air Force in 1953.^[5] He completed his airman and cadet pre-flight training at Lackland Air Force Base near San Antonio, Texas. He then traveled to Malden Air Base in Malden, Missouri, to finish his primary flight training. He earned a commission as an Air Force second lieutenant in 1955 before being assigned to Williams Air Force Base, southeast of Phoenix, Arizona.^{[2][3]}

Edward Joseph Dwight Jr.



Dwight while serving as a Captain in the United States Air Force

Born	September 9, 1933 <div>Kansas City, Kansas</div>
Nationality	American
Alma mater	Arizona State University, BS 1957 <div>University of Denver, MFA 1977</div>
Known for	Sculpture
Military career	
Allegiance	 United States of America
Service/branch	 United States Air Force
Years of service	1953–1966
Rank	 Captain
Website	www.eddwight.com (https://www.eddwight.com/)



While training to become a test pilot, Dwight attended night classes at Arizona State University. In 1957, he graduated cum laude with a B.S. in aeronautical engineering.^{[1][2][3][5]} Dwight later completed Air Force courses in experimental test piloting and aerospace research at Edwards Air Force Base in 1961 and 1962, respectively.^[6] He earned the rank of captain while serving in the Air Force.^[7]

Pre-Astronaut training

In 1961, the Kennedy administration selected Dwight as the first African American astronaut trainee,^[5] at the suggestion of the National Urban League's Whitney Young. His selection garnered international media attention, and Dwight appeared on the covers of news magazines such as *Ebony*, *Jet*, and *Sepia*.^{[1][7][8]}

Dwight proceeded to Phase II of ARPS but was not selected by NASA to be an astronaut. He resigned from the Air Force in 1966, claiming that racial politics had

forced him out of NASA and back into the regular officer corps.^{[1][7][9][10]}

Sculpting

After resigning from the Air Force, Dwight worked as an engineer, in real estate, and for IBM.^[5] He moved to Denver and earned an M.F.A. degree in sculpture from the University of Denver in 1977.^[11] He learned how to operate the University of Denver's metal casting foundry in the mid 1970s.^{[1][7]}

Each of Dwight's pieces involves blacks and civil rights activists. Most of the pieces depict only black people, but the Underground Railroad Sculpture in Battle Creek also honors Erastus and Sarah Hussey, who were conductors on the Underground Railroad. Dwight's first major work was a commission in 1974 to create a sculpture of Colorado Lieutenant Governor George L. Brown. Soon after, he was commissioned by the Colorado Centennial Commission to create a series of bronze sculptures entreated "Black Frontier in the American West".^[5]

Soon after his completion of his "Black Frontier in the American West" exhibit, Dwight created a series of over 70 bronze sculptures at the St. Louis Arch Museum at the request of the National Park Service. The series, "Jazz: An American Art Form", depicts the evolution of jazz and features jazz performers such as Louis Armstrong, Miles Davis, Duke Ellington, Ella Fitzgerald, Benny Goodman, and Charlie Parker.^[5]

Dwight owns and operates Ed Dwight Studios, based in Denver, Colorado.^[1] He is recognized for innovative use of negative space in sculpting.^[1]

Notable sculptures

Dwight has created over 100 public art sculptures, including:^[12]

Name	Picture	Location	Unveiled	Notes
African American History Monument		<u>South Carolina State House grounds – Columbia, South Carolina</u>	March 29, 2001	[1][12]
Alex Haley / Kunta Kinte Memorial		<u>The City Dock – Annapolis, Maryland</u>	December 1999	[1][12]
Black Revolutionary War Patriots Memorial		<u>Constitution Gardens – Washington, D.C.</u>	1991	[1]
Captain Walter Dyett Statue		Chicago, Illinois		[12]
Concerto		<u>Folly Theater – Kansas City, Missouri</u>		[12]
Dr. Benjamin Mays		<u>Morehouse College Commons – Atlanta, Georgia</u>		[12]
Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.		<u>Anne Arundel Community College – Annapolis, Maryland</u>	2006	[12]
<u>Statue of Martin Luther King Jr.</u>		<u>Houston, Texas</u>	2007	[12]
Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial		<u>City Park – Denver, Colorado</u>	2002	[1][12]
Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. & Coretta Scott King		<u>Allentown, Pennsylvania</u>	2011	[12]
Gateway to Freedom International Memorial to the Underground Railroad		<u>Philip A. Hart Plaza – Detroit, Michigan</u>	2001	[1][12][13]
George Washington Williams bust		<u>Ohio Statehouse – Columbus, Ohio</u>		[1]
Hank Aaron		<u>Atlanta–Fulton County Stadium – Atlanta, Georgia</u>	1982	[12]
Inauguration of History and Hope – Inaugural Sculpture Scene of President Barack Obama		Touring exhibit	2010	[12]
Jack Trice Memorial		<u>Iowa State University – Ames, Iowa</u>		[12]
Jazz: An American Art Form		<u>St. Louis Arch Museum – St. Louis, Missouri</u>		[5]
John Hope Franklin Tower of Reconciliation		<u>Tulsa, Oklahoma</u>		[12]
Mayor Harold Washington		<u>Harold Washington Cultural Center – Chicago, Illinois</u>	2004	[12]
Memorial to Rosa Parks, Mother of the Civil Rights Movement		<u>Grand Rapids, Michigan</u>	2010	[12]
Mother of Africa Chapel		<u>Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception – Washington, D.C.</u>	1997	[12]
Mr. Frederick Douglass		<u>Frederick Douglass National Historic Site – Washington, D.C.</u>	1980	Dwight's first commission ^[12]

Name	Picture	Location	Unveiled	Notes
Quincy Jones Sculpture Park		Chicago, Illinois		[1]
Soldiers Memorial		<u>Lincoln University – Jefferson City, Missouri</u>	2007	[12]
<u>Texas African American History Memorial</u>		<u>Texas State Capitol – Austin, Texas</u>	November 19, 2016	[14] Erected by the Texas African American History Memorial Foundation.
Tower of Freedom International Memorial to the Underground Railroad		Civic Esplanade – <u>Windsor, Ontario</u>	2001	[1][12][13]
Underground Railroad Memorial		Kellogg Foundation headquarters – <u>Battle Creek, Michigan</u>	1994	[12]
United House of Prayer for All People		Lincoln Cemetery – <u>Suitland, Maryland</u>	2008	[12]
William E. Smith, Director of Airports		Denver, <u>Colorado</u>		[12]

References

1. "Ed Dwight" (<http://www.thehistorymakers.com/biography/ed-dwight-39>). *thehistorymakers.com*. The HistoryMakers. June 19, 2002. Retrieved July 25, 2015.
2. Robinson, Louie (July 1963). "First Negro Astronaut Candidate". *Ebony*. **XVIII** (9): 71–81.
3. Gubert, Betty Kaplan; Sawyer, Miriam; Fannin, Caroline (2001). *Distinguished African Americans in Aviation and Space Science* (<https://archive.org/details/distinguishedafr00gube/page/113>). Westport, CT: Oryx Press. pp. 113–117 (<https://archive.org/details/distinguishedafr00gube/page/113>). ISBN 1573562467.
4. "About Ed Dwight" (<https://www.eddwight.com/about>). *Official website*.
5. "Behind the Scenes" (<http://www.eddwight.com/about/behind-scenes>). *eddwight.com*. Ed Dwight Studios, Inc. Retrieved July 25, 2015.
6. Sanders, Charles L. (June 1965). "The Troubles of 'Astronaut' Edward Dwight". *Ebony*. **XX** (8): 29–36.
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9. Brune, AM (May 28, 2015). "Ed Dwight shows 'the angst, all the emotions' of black heroes in sculpture" (<http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/may/28/ed-dwight-honouring-americas-black-heroes-in-sculpture>). *The Guardian*. Retrieved February 23, 2019. "Originally from Kansas City, he joined the US air force in 1953, where he served as a fighter pilot and was appointed by President John F Kennedy to train as the country's first black astronaut. He left in 1966, he said, after racial politics forced him out of NASA and back into the regular officer corps."

10. *We Could Not Fail: The First African Americans in the Space Program*, Chapter 5, University of Texas Press, Austin, TX, 2015, pp. 86-104
11. White III, Frank (February 1984). "The Sculptor Who Would Have Gone to Space". *Ebony*. **XXXIX** (4): 54–58.
12. "Memorials & Public Art" (<http://www.eddwight.com/memorials-public-art>). *eddwight.com*. Ed Dwight Studios, Inc. Retrieved July 25, 2015.
13. "Underground Railroad Statuary and Memorial" (<http://www.detroit1701.org/UndergroundRailroad.htm>). *detroit1701.org*. Retrieved July 25, 2015.
14. Texas State Preservation Board (http://www.tspb.texas.gov/prop/tcg/tcg-monuments/21_african_american_history/index.html)

External links

- Official website (<https://www.eddwight.com/>)
- Barbaro, Michael (host), The Almost Moon Man (<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/21/podcasts/the-daily/moon-black-astronaut-ed-dwight.html>), *The Daily*, July 21, 2019. An episode of *The Daily*, a podcast by The New York Times, featuring journalist Emily Ludolph speaking with Ed Dwight, a former Air Force pilot who had trained to be the first black astronaut.
- Ludolph, Emily (July 16, 2019). "Ed Dwight Was Set to Be the First Black Astronaut. Here's Why That Never Happened" (<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/16/us/ed-dwight-was-set-to-be-the-first-black-astronaut-heres-why-that-never-happened.html>). *The New York Times*.
- DiMeo, Nate, The Ballad of Captain Dwight (<http://themorypalace.us/2015/08/the-ballad-of-captain-dwight/>), Episode 75, *The Memory Palace*, August 28, 2015. An episode of *The Memory Palace* podcast about Edward Dwight, centered on his astronaut training. Includes parts of an interview.
- I Was Poised to be the First Black Astronaut. I Never Made it to Space. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xj1sJQW98nE>) on YouTube (December 19, 2019) part of The New York Times' *Almost Famous* Op-Doc series

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