

Scientists and Inventors

George Alcorn Jr., Physicist

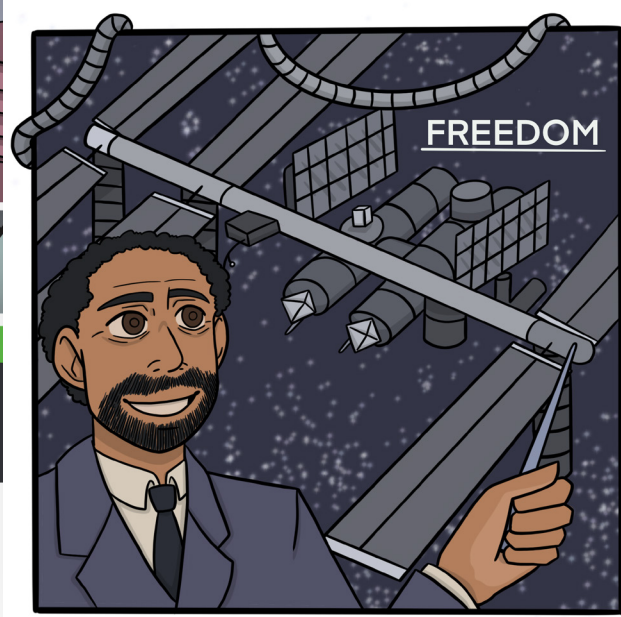
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George shuffles the papers on his desk at the University of the District of Columbia. He begins to pack some books into his briefcase to head home for the evening. He's had a busy day teaching classes ranging from advanced engineering mathematics to microelectronics. His office walls hold diplomas from Occidental College, for a Bachelor of Science in Physics, and two from Howard University, where he earned a Master of Science in Nuclear Physics, and then his doctorate in Molecular and Atomic Physics.

While at Occidental, he earned eight varsity letters during his undergraduate career, commemorated by a dusty football in the corner signed by his teammates, and a basketball trophy. A few photos of his family shine from the corner of his desk. There's his wife, Marie, cradling their newborn son in the late 1970s, when Marie was still alive. And one of George himself as a youngster standing beside his parents in front of their modest house in Indiana, where he was born in 1940.

George snaps the briefcase shut, turns off the lights and walks out of the academic building, stepping into the winter air. He regularly tutors inner-city middle school students in math and physics, so he'll have a stop before going home to his wife, Dorothy, whom he married after Marie's death. Tutoring is one way he feels he can give back, perhaps inspiring the next young achiever to carry on with what has been a lifetime of work.

George spent 12 years working in the private sector for Philco-Ford, Perkin-Elmer and IBM, before moving to NASA in 1978. At NASA, he helped develop space stations, including technology used on the Freedom space station. He has promoted



NASA technologies for use in non-space industries throughout the government, the private sector and academia. Now he's a full professor, mentoring and teaching others how to understand his complex work.

People have always wondered if there is other life in the universe. George didn't just wonder. In 1984 he patented an imaging X-ray spectrometer that could potentially detect extraterrestrial life. The X-ray spectrometer earned him the NASA-Goddard Space Flight Center award for Inventor of the Year. George has over 30 inventions and eight patents to his name. George's extraordinary mind understood the physics of the universe. He was inducted into the National Inventors Hall of Fame in 2015.

George looks up at the stars above him, with the North Star sparkling and the Milky Way leaving a glittering smear across the sky. He sighs at the sheer magnitude of it. When he looks at the stars during his nightly walk to the parking lot, he still sees mystery, but the patterns make sense to him.

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