

28 How I Invented a New Supercomputer



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On the Fourth of July 1989, the U.S. Independence Day, I experimentally discovered a new supercomputer that could solve 65,536 problems

at once,

or that could process information in parallel.

Before that invention of the Fourth of July 1989, parallel processing was dismissed as science fiction by the authors of textbooks on supercomputing.
Before that invention, solving many problems at once was ridiculed as a beautiful theory that lacked an experimental confirmation.

On the Fourth of July 1989, the technology of the parallel processing supercomputer became a tested reality. Before the Fourth of July 1989, the massively parallel processing supercomputer
was like an elephant
with a super body
and the brain of an ant.

The massively parallel processing supercomputer

was a transformative technology that moved detailed data modeling from dream to reality.

The massively parallel processing supercomputer is the technology that enabled

precision petroleum reservoir simulation of the Niger-Delta oilfields of the southeastern region of my country of birth, Nigeria. The invention

of the massively parallel processing supercomputer

opened the door

for air-cooled supercomputers with no requirement for liquid cooling.

28.1.1 Philip Emeagwali Supercomputer

I'm Philip Emeagwali.

I made headlines in major U.S. newspapers for discovering the massively parallel processing supercomputer, such as the June 20, 1990 issue of the Wall Street Journal.

I am a supercomputer scientist who began programming supercomputers, exactly sixteen years earlier, on June 20, 1974 in Corvallis, Oregon, United States.

The supercomputer
is the world's fastest computer.
The supercomputer
is a living machine that grows
with each increase in speed.
At 8:15 on the morning
of the Fourth of July 1989
in Los Alamos, New Mexico, United States,
I experimentally discovered
the fastest supercomputer.

I invented

a new supercomputer

that computes **across** a new internet that is a new global network of 65,536 tightly-coupled processors. I mathematically and experimentally invented

how to tackle 65,536 challenging initial-boundary value problems arising in mathematics and physics.

I invented

how to solve those grand challenge problems and how to solve them in a one-to-one corresponded manner.

I invented

how to use emails to and from sixteen-bit long addresses, each with no @ sign or dot com suffix, and how to use those emails to stitch those 65,536 problems together. I invented

how to stitch problems together as the original grand challenge problem. To reach that new frontier of human knowledge demanded new techniques and technologies, such as a new arithmetic, a new algebra, a new calculus, a new computer, and, most importantly, a new internet. The massively parallel processing supercomputer

was not invented

by the team of 25,000 vector processing supercomputer scientists of the 1980s.

I conducted

the parallel processing experiment that led to the discovery on the Fourth of July 1989 of the massively parallel processing supercomputer.

I—**Philip Emeagwali**—was the only person that invented

how to harness the total supercomputer power of 65,536 separate processors.

After my invention, the fastest one thousand supercomputers in the world are supercomputing **across** thousands or millions of commodity-off-the-shelf processors.

That shift

from one processor to one million processors is the biggest paradigm shift in the history of the computer.

28.1.2 Who's Philip Emeagwali, the Discoverer of Parallel Processing?

Since 1989, school children
were asked to write a school report
on the contributions of Philip Emeagwali
to the development
of the modern supercomputer.
Back in 1989, it made the news headlines
that a lone wolf
African supercomputer wizard
the United States
had invented
how to solve
the toughest problems
arising in modern calculus
and computational physics,

and mathematically invented how to solve 65,536 initial-boundary value problems of modern mathematics and invented how to solve them at once.

That invention occurred on the Fourth of July 1989 and is called the "massively parallel processing supercomputer."

I-Philip Emeagwali-

was that African supercomputer scientist that was in the news back in 1989.

I was in the news because

I experimentally discovered

that the fastest computing speeds in modern supercomputing must always be recorded with parallel processing technology,

rather than with vector processing technology.

28.1.3 Group Thinking is the Enemy of Progress

For the fifteen years, onward of June 20, 1974, I conducted my supercomputer research alone.

I did so alone because I was ridiculed, mocked, and rejected

by all-white research teams that were exclusively programming only sequential and vector processing supercomputers.

As a black African-born supercomputer scientist in the United States, I felt like I was in exile wherever I am.

I'm in exile in the United States.

I was in exile in Africa.

I was in exile in the then uncharted territory of the massively parallel processing supercomputer.

A multidisciplinary supercomputer research team could comprise of one thousand scientists and engineers.

Each member of that supercomputer research team was at the frontier of knowledge

Or at the frontier of knowledge of mathematics.

Or at the frontier of knowledge of computer science.

To discover parallel processing required both theory and experiments and required a polymath, rather than a mathematician.

To invent

of physics.

the massively parallel processing supercomputer

required a polymath that was simultaneously at home at the frontiers of physics, mathematics, and computer science. It took me sixteen years of advanced training, onward of March 25, 1974, in Oregon (United States) as well as weekly attendances at 500 research seminars of the 1980s in the District of Columbia and Maryland (United States), to become that triple threat and that polymath that is at home at the frontiers of knowledge in physics, mathematics, and computer science. Most importantly, I was the only research scientist that gave massively parallel processing research lectures to audiences of research

computational physicists at the United States national laboratories. I gave research lectures to research mathematicians at the international congress of mathematicians. I gave research lectures to research computer scientists of the two premier computer societies in the world, namely, The Computer Society of the IEEE and the Association for Computing Machinery. In the late 1970s and early '80s, I was rejected because white research scientists dismissed me before they heard me give my research lectures on how I invented the massively parallel processing supercomputer.

The audio and video recordings of my lectures on the new supercomputer that I invented are posted at emeagwali dot com. To work cohesively as a supercomputer research team demands that each team member follow the team leader. The supercomputer research teams of the 1970s and '80s were coerced to group think and were technologically brainwashed to group think only in the direction of conventional vector processing supercomputing. The leading proponents of vector processing supercomputers were the leading opponents of parallel processing supercomputers.

28.1.4 Sometimes, The Impossible is Possible

In 1989,

there were 25,000 users of vector processing supercomputers. I was the only fulltime programmer of the handful of massively parallel processing supercomputers of the 1980s. Gene Amdahl and Seymour Cray, the two leading opponents of the parallel processing supercomputer, argued that it will forever remain impossible to parallel process through as many as eight processors or computer cores. In the 1940s through '60s, the group thinkers in the field of supercomputing focused only on the sequential processing supercomputer technology. In the 1970s and '80s, the group thinkers in supercomputing focused only on the

vector processing supercomputer technology.

In those two decades,
I was forced to work as a lone wolf supercomputer scientist that was not a member of a 400-person research team.

For that reason,

I wasn't indoctrinated into group thinking that vector processing must always be superior to parallel processing.

Like other black African scientists of the 1970s United States,

I wasn't accepted

into any supercomputer research group.

That rejection

forced me to forge a different path

to the modern parallel processing supercomputer.

That rejection

forced me to think individually

on how to harness the power of the massively parallel processing supercomputer and how to invent the technology and know it, for the first time, as the engine that drives the modern parallel processing supercomputer. The reason my invention of the massively parallel processing supercomputer made the news headlines and was recorded in the June 20, 1990 issue of The Wall Street Journal was that the parallel processing supercomputer technology of today was then dismissed and abandoned by the leaders of thought in supercomputing—namely, Gene Amdahl and Seymour Crayand was then rejected by their followers who described parallel processing as a huge waste of everybody's time.

28.1.5 Seeing the Unseen

What kept me moving forward towards the first fastest computation that I executed on the Fourth of July 1989 and executed across my ensemble of 65,536 tightly-coupled processors was a back-of-the-envelope, theoretical calculation that I did in the 1970s. From that back-of-the-envelope calculation, I theoretically discovered that—in theory two-to-power sixteen processors that could only calculate forty-seven thousand three hundred and three [47,303] floating-point arithmetical operations per second per processor can be integrated across a small internet

that is a new global network of 65,536 tightly-coupled commodity-off-the-shelf processors with each processor operating its own operating system and with each processor having its own dedicated memory that shared nothing with each other. That is, I discovered, a priori, that my new internet will become my new supercomputer that will be faster than the old vector processing supercomputer that was the industry's state-of-the-art technology and that computes less than 3.1 billion calculations per second. In the 1980s, I was the lone full time programmer of the only massively parallel processing supercomputer that was an ensemble of 65,536 processors.

I was a lone wolf research supercomputer scientist that was not a member of a 400-person supercomputer research team. Such research teams were funded by the United States government. Such research teams were funded to bring the best brains from United States national laboratories and use that intellectual capital to bear on a grand challenge problem, or the toughest problem in computational physics. Such problems were described as grand challenges because they were perceived to be otherwise unsolveable. What made the news headlines was that I—**Philip Emeagwali**—had invented how to harness those computing units,

namely, a new internet

that is a new global network of 65,536 processors.

I invented

how to harness those ensemble of processors to process simultaneously and to process together and to do so as one cohesive whole unit, or to process in parallel, or to process as one integrated super processor that is a never-before-seen supercomputer that is the precursor to the modern supercomputer that I expect to become the computer of tomorrow. That is, in the 1970s and '80s, my technological quest was for how to massively parallel process across a new internet and how to massively parallel process and do so at a time theorists were theorizing their way through parallel processing.

A theory is not a discovery. A theory is an idea that is not positively true. In the 1970s and '80s, parallel processing was ridiculed, mocked, and rejected. Parallel processing was scorned as a beautiful theory that lacked experimental confirmation. It's not possible to experimentally discover the fastest speeds in supercomputing and discover that fastest speed by merely and only theorizing about how to achieve the fastest speeds via the massively parallel processing supercomputer-hopeful. In my experimental confirmation of the new fastest speed in supercomputing that occurred on the Fourth of July 1989, and occurred in Los Alamos, New Mexico, United States, I confirmed that the massively parallel processing supercomputer

can be programmed to increase productivity and to reduce the time-to-solution of the toughest problems in extreme-scale computational physics and to reduce that time-to-solution from 65,536 days, 180 years, on only one processor to just one day

across a new internet

that is a new global network of 65,536 commodity-off-the-shelf processors that were identical and that were equal distances apart.

After my invention of the massively parallel processing supercomputer the technological progress that followed in the subsequent three decades was a series of cleanups and refinements and re-discoveries.

Three decades later,

my invention of the massively parallel processing supercomputer enabled China to copy that massively parallel processing supercomputer and to use the technology to massively reduce their time-to-solution and reduce it from thirty thousand [30,000] years, or ten million six hundred and forty-nine thousand six hundred [10,649,600] days, of time-to-solution on only one processor to just one day across ten million six hundred and forty-nine thousand six hundred [10,649,600] commodity-off-the-shelf processors. That was how China -that did not invent the massively parallel processing

supercomputer massively parallel processed its way to the world's fastest supercomputers.

28.1.6 My Quest for a New Supercomputer

To enter into the unknown world of the massively parallel processing supercomputer, required that I begin sequential processing supercomputing and begin it on June 20, 1974 in Corvallis, Oregon, United States. I began supercomputing when I was only nineteen years old. I began supercomputing at 1800 SW Campus Way, Corvallis, Oregon, United States. When I began supercomputing, I was new in the United States, having arrived on March 24, 1974 after receiving a scholarship letter

that was dated September 10, 1973. Then and now, and excluding athletes only a dozen or so Nigerian teenagers were invited each year to study in the United States and offered a four-year academic scholarship to do so. As an aside, many of the famous computer pioneers of today were also teenagers in 1973, and were born at about the same time -of August 23, 1954that I was born. I was born in Akure in the heart of Yoruba Land in the Western Region of the British West African colony of Nigeria. I was born in Yoruba Land to Igbo parents

who grew up in Onitsha, Igbo Land, of south eastern Nigeria and lived in Kano, Hausa Land, in the late 1940s. My father was educated, for the six years inclusive from 1942 to '47, at Christ the King College, Onitsha, in the southeastern region of Nigeria. My father left Kano, at age 29, to come to Akure in 1950 to work as a nurse in the small hospital in Akure. In the early 1950s, my father's salary of five pounds a month supported a dozen extended family members both in Akure and Onitsha, Nigeria. I was born in a Boy's Quarter that was at the junction of Eke Emeso Street and Oba Adesida Road, Akure, Nigeria. I was born on Monday under the sign of Virgo. The U.S. president, on the day I was born,

was Dwight D. Eisenhower, a Republican. Since Nigeria was then a British colony, Queen Elizabeth the Second, was the Head of State of Nigeria. The Governor-General of Nigeria on the day that I was born, Sir John Macpherson, represented Queen Elizabeth. When I was born, there were five adults sharing a tiny room and a tiny parlour, namely, my father Nnaemeka James Emeagwali, my mother Iyanma Agatha Emeagwali, my aunt Nkemdilim Grace Azuokwu, my cousin Vincent Emeagwali, and my cousin Charles Emeagwali. Aunt Nkemdilim came from Onitsha

three days after I was born



and on August 26, 1954. Aunt Nkemdilim came for three-month *ine omugor*.

Steve Jobs

was nineteen years old then and lived an hour's drive from Corvallis, Oregon, and lived in Portland, Oregon.

Bill Gates

was nineteen years old then and lived three hour's drive from Corvallis, Oregon and lived in the border state of Washington, United States.

The difference between the other research physicists, research mathematicians, and research computer scientists, and myself—Philip Emeagwali, that was a massively parallel processing supercomputer scientist— was that those researchers were plowing

the **frontier** of computational physics or the **frontier** of modern calculus or the **frontier** of abstract algebra or the **frontier** of the vector processing supercomputer.

Most research supercomputer scientists of the 1970s and '80s were plowing frontiers of knowledge that had already been plowed.

As a massively parallel processing supercomputer scientist of the 1970s and '80s,

I did not believe in re-plowing the frontier of knowledge of the sequential processing supercomputer or in re-plowing the frontier of knowledge of the vector processing supercomputer that had already been plowed.

Re-plowing

the frontiers of scientific knowledge that had already been plowed makes as little difference as searching for new crude oil and natural gas in the Oloibiri Oil Field

of Bayelsa State of Nigeria.

The Oloibiri Oil Field

was the first oilfield discovered in West Africa.

The Oloibiri Oil Field dried up after twenty years of oil exploration

and was abandoned back in 1978.

Comparing the new massively parallel processing supercomputer technology

to the old vector processing supercomputer technology was like comparing

constructing a brand new highway from Cairo (**Egypt**, North Africa)

through Lagos (Nigeria, West Africa)

that is 95 hours of non-stop driving of six and half thousand kilometers

and constructing that brand new highway

to Johannesburg (South Africa)
that is 98 hours of non-stop driving
of nearly 7,000 kilometers
from Lagos (Nigeria)
and comparing
that super highway construction project

to the superficial re-paving of the existing half an hour drive, 45 kilometer highway between my ancestral hometown of Onitsha (Nigeria) and Awka (Nigeria). That is the reason the massively parallel processing supercomputer costs the budget of a small nation. Since the first sequential processing supercomputer was invented in 1946, the price-performance of the supercomputer dropped continuously and exponentially. If that pace of technological progress upholds, the supercomputer of today

will become the computer of tomorrow. On the Fourth of July 1989, I—**Philip Emeagwali**—entered into the history book. I was profiled in books such as the one that was titled: "History of the Internet." I am the subject of school reports because I experimentally discovered a new way of looking at the modern computer. The June 20, 1990 issue of The Wall Street Journal recorded that I experimentally discovered a new paradigm, called massively parallel processing supercomputing. That new paradigm in supercomputing changed how we compute and changed how we solve the toughest problems in modern calculus

and extreme-scale computational physics.

That new paradigm changed how we solve the system of partial differential equations that governs initial-boundary value problems of modern mathematics, such as general circulation modeling to foresee otherwise unforeseeable climate changes. That new paradigm changed how we solve the toughest problems in extreme-scale computational physics and changed how we solve those problems in parallel and changed how we solve those problems at the fastest supercomputer speeds. I was asked: "What makes a discovery or an invention newsworthy?" I answered that,

first and foremost, the new knowledge

that is embodied within the scientific discovery or within the technological invention must compete with new celebrity gossips and new hot button political and religious issues. For those reasons, a newsworthy contribution to human knowledge must be bold and strange, or be a new paradigm, such as be the invention of the massively parallel processing supercomputer that solves the toughest problems in extreme-scale computational physics and solves them in an unorthodox manner that challenges expectations. Discovering a new paradigm in supercomputing prompts the leaders of thought in the world of computers

to ask for the discoverer's telephone number. That's how and why **Steve Jobs** got my telephone number and contacted me in about June 1990. Back in the 1970s and '80s, parallel processing was ridiculed, mocked, and rejected as a beautiful theory that lacked experimental confirmation. Today, we take it for granted that the modern massively parallel processing supercomputer harnesses the total computing power of up to ten million six hundred and forty-nine thousand six hundred [10,649,600] commodity-off-the-shelf processors that are identical.

But to **Steve Jobs** my invention of the parallel processing supercomputer was like science fiction becoming non-fiction.

28.1.7 The Polymath vs. The Mathematician

A research mathematician that is trained only in mathematics or a research physicist that is trained only in physics or a research computer scientist that is trained only in computer science cannot [cannot, cannot] theoretically and experimentally discover the massively parallel processing supercomputer that is the **precursor** of our modern supercomputer. Only a **polymath**, that is simultaneously at home at the frontier of the system of coupled, non-linear, time-dependent, and state-of-the-art partial differential equations of modern calculus

and a **polymath** that is at home at the frontiers of extreme-scale algebra and computational physics and a **polymath** that is at home at the frontier of the massively parallel processing supercomputer and only that **polymath** can invent

how to harness
64 binary thousand tightly-coupled
commodity-off-the-shelf processors
that shared nothing with each other
and invent

how to solve a grand challenge problem in extreme-scale computational fluid dynamics.

The SIAM News is the flagship bi-monthly news journal of record

of the Society of Industrial and Applied Mathematics.
The articles in the SIAM News are about new mathematics

that are yet to enter into any mathematics textbook. The articles in the SIAM News are written by research mathematicians and are written for research mathematicians. The reason my new mathematics for computational mathematicians computing across an ensemble of processors was the cover story of the May 1990 issue of the widely-read SIAM News was that I was a research extreme-scale computational mathematician who pushed the **frontiers** of modern calculus and extreme-scale algebra and computation-intensive arithmetic. I pushed the **frontier** of the modern calculus by a distance of thirty-six [36] partial derivative terms that were not in any calculus textbook that was used by the petroleum industry.

I invented

how to solve the most large-scale system of equations of algebra that must be solved to recover otherwise unrecoverable crude oil and natural gas.

I invented

how to execute
the fastest floating-point
arithmetical operations
for extreme-scale computations
in science and engineering.
The reason computational mather

The reason computational mathematicians call them floating-point operations is that the position of the decimal point is constantly tracked.

The reason I won the highest award in supercomputing was that I was a supercomputer scientist who pushed the **frontiers** of the most massively parallel processing supercomputer.

And the reason

research computational physicists invited me to give lectures at NASA, Los Alamos National Laboratory, and various U.S. research laboratories was that I pushed the **frontiers** of extreme-scale computational physics. The reason I programmed supercomputers alone was that I discovered that —as a polymath that is a multi-disciplinary scientist— I could do research alone. After sixteen years of sequential processing supercomputing and vector processing supercomputing and parallel processing supercomputing, I realized that I had more hands-on programming experience on the first massively parallel processing supercomputer that parallel processed across a new internet

that I envisioned as a new global network of 65,536 processors and that I knew how to solve extreme-scale systems of equations of modern algebra and that I was the first person to understand how to solve them at unheard of speeds. Looking back, I devoted two hundred thousand [200,000] hours of my life thinking about the massively parallel processing supercomputer that is a new internet, which, in turn, is more than anybody else did. My command of materials and my possession of the interdisciplinary fluency that made it possible for me to conduct my research alone and for me to deliver my lectures on my contributions to the development of

the massively parallel processing supercomputer show in my lectures that are posted at emeagwali dot com. My Eureka Moment during which I invented the precursor to the modern supercomputer occurred in Los Alamos, New Mexico, United States and occurred at 8:15 in the morning of Tuesday the Fourth of July 1989, the U.S. Independence Day.

28.1.8 Philip Emeagwali Supercomputer

At age nineteen and on June 20, 1974, in Corvallis, Oregon, United States, where I started programming the first supercomputer that was rated at one million instructions per second, there were hardly any

supercomputer scientist
in the world
that was interested in programming
the parallel processing supercomputer.
In 1974 and earlier,
the technology of parallel processing
was science fiction
and was scorned as a beautiful theory
that lacked an experimental confirmation.
Sixteen years later, I was the only full time
supercomputer programmer in the world
that was programming
the most parallel processing supercomputer
ever built.

Today, all supercomputer scientists are massively parallel processing across millions upon millions of tightly-coupled commodity-off-the-shelf processors that shared nothing with each other. The reason my experimental discovery of the massively parallel processing supercomputer

that occurred on the Fourth of July 1989 made the news headlines was that the supercomputing community said that I made the impossible-to-compute possible-to-compute and did so by giving me the top prize in the field of supercomputing. When I won that top award in 1989, the 25,000 supercomputer scientists in the world had little faith in the parallel processing supercomputer that is the precursor to the modern supercomputer. Those 25,000 supercomputer scientists were deeply entrenched behind their vector processing supercomputers, and, for that reason, they avoided programming the ensemble of



65,536 tightly-coupled processors that outlined and defined the precursor

to the modern supercomputer.

My invention

of the parallel processing supercomputer opened the door

of hybrid supercomputers that comprised of hundreds of cabinets and tens of thousands of computer nodes and as many **GPU** accelerators.

The **GPU**

is the acronym for graphics processing unit, just as the **CPU**

is the acronym for central processing unit.

The **GPU**

is the soul of the computer while the **CPU** is the brain of the computer.

Today, the parallel processing technology is used to reduce 30,000 years of **time-to-solution**

on only one processor to only one day of time-to-solution on the fastest supercomputer. That extraordinary reduction of time-to-solution on the modern supercomputer translates to increased productivity. In the new parallel processing supercomputer paradigm, the time-to-market was reduced from decades to months and the time-to-discovery was reduced from years to days and the time-to-forecast was reduced from months to minutes. The most important question in computer science or in extreme-scale computational physics, called the Grand Challenge Problem by the United States government is this: "How do we increase the speed of computers?"

I answered that grand challenge question with my experimentally-verified invention of how to massively parallel process and how to do so **across**

a new internet

that is a new global network of 65,536 commodity processors.

Those processors

were identical.

Those processors

were equal distances apart

from each other.

Those processors

shared nothing with each other.

That invention

of the parallel processing supercomputer is my contribution to the development of the computer.

I'm **Philip Emeagwali**. at emeagwa**li**.com. Thank you.