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The Moon Landing

Neil A. Armstrong



OVERVIEW

News that the Soviet Union had launched a satellite—*Sputnik I*—into orbit around the earth in 1957, stunned Americans. The United States reacted to what they saw as Soviet technical superiority and the “space race” began. In May 1961, President John F. Kennedy announced that the United States would land a man on the moon before the end of the decade. In July 1969, a lunar module, nicknamed “Eagle” landed on the moon’s surface. Neil Armstrong, an astronaut, descended from the module’s ladder and became the first human to walk on the moon. Several weeks later, on September 16, Armstrong and the other astronauts on the mission, Edwin E. Aldrin and Michael Collins, addressed a joint session of Congress. [The audio version takes place in July on Tranquility Base, the lunar surface. It is Armstrong’s message to the American people.]

GUIDED READING As you read, consider the following questions:

- What was Armstrong’s purpose on this mission?
- What message does Armstrong give the American public?

We landed on the Sea of Tranquility, in the cool of the early lunar morning, when the long shadows would aid our perception.

The sun was only ten degrees above the horizon, while the earth turned through nearly a full day during our stay, the sun at Tranquility Base rose barely eleven degrees—a small fraction of the month-long lunar day. There was a peculiar sensation of the duality of time—the swift rush of events that characterizes all our lives—and the ponderous parade which makes the aging of the universe.

Both kinds of time were evident—the first by the routine events of the flight—whose planning and execution were detailed to fractions of a second—the latter by rocks around us, unchanged throughout the history of man—whose three-billion-year-old secrets made them the treasures we sought.

The plaque on the “Eagle” which summarized our hopes bears this message:

Here men from the planet earth first set foot upon the moon July 1969 A.D.

We came in peace for all mankind whose nineteen hundred and sixty-nine years had constituted the majority of the age of Pisces—a twelfth of the great year that is measured by the thousand generations the precession of the earth’s axis requires to scribe a giant circle in the heavens.

In the next twenty centuries, the age of Aquarius of the great year, the age for which our young people have such high hopes, humanity may begin to

understand its most baffling mystery—where are we going? The earth is, in fact, traveling many thousands of miles per hour in the direction of the constellation Hercules—to some unknown destination in the cosmos. Man must understand his universe in order to understand his destiny.

Mystery, however, is a very necessary ingredient in our lives.

Mystery creates wonder and wonder is the basis for man's desire to understand. Who knows what mysteries will be solved in our lifetime, and what new riddles will become the challenge of the new generations? Science has not mastered prophesy. We predict too much for next year yet far too little for the next ten. Responding to challenge is one of democracy's great strengths. Our successes in space lead us to hope that this strength can be used in the next decade in the solution of many of our planet's problems.

Several weeks ago I enjoyed the warmth of reflection on the true meaning of the spirit of Apollo.

I stood in the highlands of this nation near the Continental Divide, introducing to my sons the wonders of nature, and pleasures of looking for deer and elk.

In their enthusiasm for the view they frequently stumbled on the rocky trails. But when they looked only to their footing, they did not see the elk. To those of you who have advocated looking high we owe our sincerest gratitude, for you have granted us the opportunity to see some of the grandest views of the Creator.

To those of you who have been our honest critics, we also thank, for you have reminded us that we dare not forget to watch the trail. We carried on Apollo 11 two flags of this Union that had flown over the Capitol, one over the House of Representatives, one over the Senate.

It is our privilege to return them now in these halls which exemplify man's highest purpose—to serve one's fellow man.

We thank you, on behalf of all the men of Apollo, for giving us the privilege of joining you in serving—for all mankind.

Sources:

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