

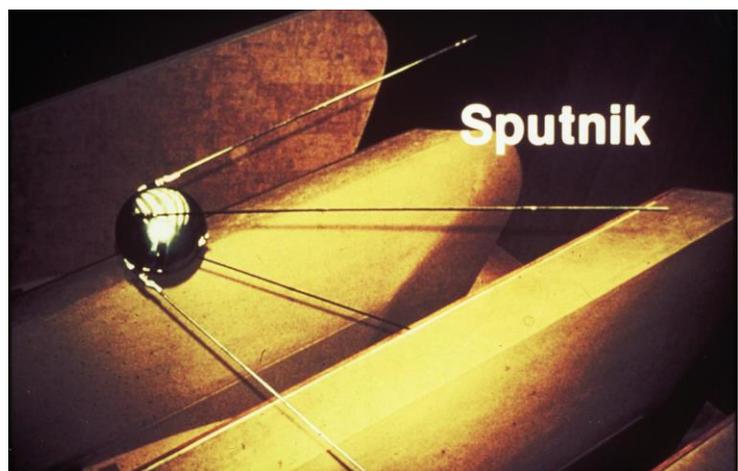
## INTRODUCTION

Throughout the nineteenth century, the United States expanded westward toward the Pacific coast. With those aspirations achieved, the mid-twentieth century looked upward to explore outer space. The White House's ambitions to reach beyond the earth's atmosphere were largely fueled by the United States' space race with the Soviet Union. The subsequent competition between both nations brought about a surge of scientific advancements and technologies. Discover how the White House and presidents played a role in space exploration.

## CONTEXTUAL ESSAY

The Cold War framed the start of the United States' focus on outer space. Although allies during World War II, the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, better known as the USSR or the Soviet Union, did not remain on friendly terms after the defeat of Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan. Differences between the United States and the Soviet Union led to the start of the Cold War, an ideological and political struggle between capitalism and communism that manifested as threats, tensions, and proxy wars lasting for several decades. Both countries sought global dominance through achievements in space exploration.

On October 4, 1957, the Soviet Union caused a panic in the United States by launching a small satellite called Sputnik into orbit (**Image 1**). Then on November 7, 1957, President Dwight D. Eisenhower delivered a televised address from the Oval Office to explain America's failure to become the first country to send a satellite into outer space. Many Americans feared this new satellite technology might make it



*Image 1*

easier for Soviet nuclear missiles to reach the United States, a concern that persisted throughout the Cold War.

After his Oval Office broadcast, President Eisenhower moved quickly to bolster the United States' space program. He supported the creation of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and signed the National Defense Education Act to encourage the study of science (**Images 2 & 3**). On January 31, 1958, the United States launched its first satellite, Explorer I, into Earth's orbit (**Image 4**). In December of the same year, Eisenhower announced at a White House dinner that NASA had launched the largest object ever into space, a missile with a satellite. The next day this satellite transmitted a radio recording of Eisenhower's voice wishing the world "peace on earth and good will toward men." The United States had wasted no time in catching up to Sputnik.



*Image 5*

In April of 1961, beaten by the Soviet Union in the race to put a human into space, President John F. Kennedy met with Vice President Lyndon Johnson in the White House to strategize. The immediate result of these discussions was Alan Shepard's space flight on May 5, 1961 (**Image 5**). President Kennedy presented Shepard with the NASA Distinguished Service Award a few days after his historic flight. The ceremony took place in the Rose Garden just outside the West Wing (**Image 6**).

When Kennedy spoke to a joint session of Congress a few weeks later (**Image 7**), he challenged the nation to "commit itself to achieving the goal, before this decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to earth." A step toward that goal came on February 20, 1962 when John Glenn returned safely after orbiting the earth three times. In Washington, D.C., Kennedy and Johnson greeted Glenn with much fanfare (**Images 8 & 9**).

President Kennedy was assassinated before the United States flag was planted on the moon, but he did succeed in energizing America's space program. President Lyndon B. Johnson continued to support the mission to the moon and the advancement of the space program (**Image 10**). Then, on July 20, 1969, President Richard Nixon spoke by radiotelephone to Apollo 11 Commander Neil Armstrong and Lunar Module Pilot Edwin "Buzz" Aldrin: "Hello, Neil and Buzz. I'm talking to you by telephone from the Oval Room at the White House, and this certainly has to be the most historic telephone call ever made" (**Image 11**). Half a billion people around the world watched as the United States became the first nation to place humans on the moon (**Images 12 & 13**).

The Apollo missions continued for several years, resulting in five additional moon landings. In 1974, Cold War relations thawed enough to allow the United States and the Soviet Union to plan a joint mission, the Apollo-Soyuz Test Project. This mission proved not only that two-dissimilar spacecraft could dock together, but also that Soviets and Americans could cooperate on shared goals. First, the crewmen from both nations visited President Gerald Ford in the White House on September 7, 1974 (**Image 14**). The following summer, in July 1975, the two crafts met in orbit, and the crews exchanged handshakes. Back on earth, Ford called to congratulate the crewmen on their success (**Image 15**).



*Image 13*

Not all moments in space exploration were successful. On January 28, 1986, America experienced a shocking disaster when the Space Shuttle Challenger exploded seventy-three seconds after launch. President Ronald Reagan was among the millions of people who watched the explosion that killed the entire crew of seven (**Image 16**). Reagan had planned to give his State of the Union address to



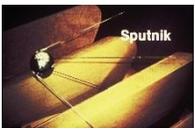
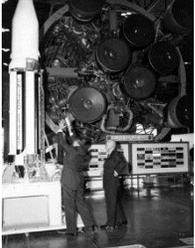
Congress that night, but instead he spoke from the Oval Office about the bravery and sacrifices made by the Challenger's crew:

I know it is hard to understand, but sometimes painful things like this happen. It's all part of the process of exploration and discovery. It's all part of taking a chance and expanding man's horizons. The future doesn't belong to the fainthearted; it belongs to the brave. The Challenger crew was pulling us into the future, and we'll continue to follow them.

Despite setbacks and budget concerns, the United States continues to explore outer space to advance scientific knowledge. In 1998, seven years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia and the United States, along with other countries, came together to build the International Space Station (ISS). President Bill Clinton visited with NASA during ISS training (**Image 17**). The ISS required cooperation, not competition, between global superpowers. Twenty-first century presidents have remained attentive to NASA projects, cooperative missions with other nations' space programs, and the technological advancements made through these missions.

IMAGES

*Click on web link to access online and for larger viewing*

Source	Title	Date	Created By	Courtesy Of	Thumbnail	Web Link
1	Sputnik, Early Rocket	1957	Unknown	National Aeronautics and Space Administration		<a href="https://images.nasa.gov/#/details-9248168.html">https://images.nasa.gov/#/details-9248168.html</a>
2	President Eisenhower Meets with NASA Administrators	1959	Unknown	National Aeronautics and Space Administration		<a href="https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Events/1113352.jpg.info">https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Events/1113352.jpg.info</a>
3	Dwight D. Eisenhower Tours NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center	1960	National Park Service	Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Museum and Boyhood Home		<a href="https://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/research/audiovisual/images/nasa/72_3549_21.jpg">https://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/research/audiovisual/images/nasa/72_3549_21.jpg</a>
4	Explorer I Launching from Cape Canaveral, Florida	1958	Unknown	National Aeronautics and Space Administration		<a href="https://images.nasa.gov/#/details-ksc-68p-1.html">https://images.nasa.gov/#/details-ksc-68p-1.html</a>
5	President John F. Kennedy Watches Lift-off of Astronaut Alan Shepard	1961	Cecil W. Stoughton	National Aeronautics and Space Administration		<a href="https://www.jfklibrary.org/AssetViewer/Archives/JFKWHP-ST-116-9-61.aspx">https://www.jfklibrary.org/AssetViewer/Archives/JFKWHP-ST-116-9-61.aspx</a>
6	President Kennedy with Astronaut Alan Shepard	1961	Unknown	National Aeronautics and Space Administration		<a href="https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Events/1113350.jpg.info">https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Events/1113350.jpg.info</a>

# SPACE EXPLORATION AND THE WHITE HOUSE



7	President Kennedy Speaks to Congress about the Space Program	1961	Unknown	National Aeronautics and Space Administration		<a href="https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Events/1113353.jpg.info">https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Events/1113353.jpg.info</a>
8	President Kennedy with Astronaut John Glenn	1962	Warren K. Leffler	Library of Congress		<a href="https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Events/1113351.tif.info">https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Events/1113351.tif.info</a>
9	John Glenn Gives a Thumbs Up to Onlookers	1962	Warren K. Leffler	Library of Congress		<a href="https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Events/1113347.tif.info">https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Events/1113347.tif.info</a>
10	President Johnson Watches Saturn Rocket Launch	1964	Abbie Rowe	National Archives and Records Administration		<a href="https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Lyndon%20B%20Johnson/5556.tif.info">https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Lyndon%20B%20Johnson/5556.tif.info</a>
11	White House phone used to make call to Apollo 11	Ca. 1969	Unknown	Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum/ NARA		<a href="https://www.nixonlibrary.gov/for-kids/speeches-for-kids/moonlanding/moonlanding-phone.jpg">https://www.nixonlibrary.gov/for-kids/speeches-for-kids/moonlanding/moonlanding-phone.jpg</a>
12	Nixon and Astronaut on Split TV Screen	1969	Unknown	Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum/ NARA		<a href="https://www.nixonlibrary.gov/for-kids/speeches-for-kids/moonlanding/nixonastronautmooncomposite.jpg">https://www.nixonlibrary.gov/for-kids/speeches-for-kids/moonlanding/nixonastronautmooncomposite.jpg</a>
13	President Nixon Greets the Returning Apollo 11 Astronauts	1969	Unknown	National Aeronautics and Space Administration		<a href="https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Events/1113354.jpg.info">https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Events/1113354.jpg.info</a>



14	President Ford with Apollo-Soyuz Astronauts and Cosmonauts	1974	Unknown	National Aeronautics and Space Administration		<a href="https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Events/1113355.jpg.info">https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Events/1113355.jpg.info</a>
15	President Ford Speaks with Apollo-Soyuz Crew	1975	Unknown	National Aeronautics and Space Administration		<a href="https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Events/1113356.jpg.info">https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Events/1113356.jpg.info</a>
16	Ronald Reagan Watches Coverage of the Explosion of Space Shuttle Challenger	1986	Unknown	Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum/ NARA		<a href="https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Ronald%20Reagan/2882.tif.info">https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Ronald%20Reagan/2882.tif.info</a>
17	President Clinton Visits Johnson Space Center	1998	Unknown	National Aeronautics and Space Administration		<a href="https://images.nasa.gov/#/details-98_05025.html">https://images.nasa.gov/#/details-98_05025.html</a>

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Video: Eisenhower Speech, Science and National Security, 11/7/1957. [Click here.](#)
- Audio: Audio of President Richard Nixon’s call to Neil Armstrong during the moon landing. [Click here.](#)



## SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHERS

- Using this essay and your own knowledge of the Cold War, pretend you lived in 1958 and write a diary entry about how you might feel upon hearing the first radio recording transmitted by a space satellite. *Recordings of the broadcast can be found online.*
- Using the essay and sources, create a timeline of important moments from the United States' space program.
  - Add to the space program timeline with additional dates by researching on NASA's website. [Click here.](#)
  - Add political context by creating a second timeline containing the twentieth and twenty-first century presidential administrations. See how the two timelines overlap and interact. Use WHHA's Presidents Timeline page. [Click here.](#)
- Space exploration continues to the present day. Research a current event about space exploration and see how that event connects to the White House or the president.
- Create a time capsule that will be sent out on the next space mission. The purpose will be to inform future alien populations about how we got to space and what role the White House has played in it. Pick the five resources that best explain the journey.