4inkjets www.4inkjets.com
Save up to 76% on Ink & Toner
Free Shipping on Orders Over $50
Click Here to Save Big!
Click Here

The final American frontier: Once the focus of future dreams, is space what it used to be?

TED ANTHONY, AP National Writer
7:46 AM PDT, July 18, 2009

MOON, Pa. (AP) — On July 22, 1969, barely 48 hours after a human being first stepped onto the moon's surface, a community in Pittsburgh's western suburbs called Moon Township had a parade, as suburban communities do.

Understandably, Moon had achieved some notoriety in the weeks leading up to Apollo 11's lunar landing. And on this day, it named Armstrong, Aldrin and Collins honorary citizens and lowered an "astronaut" from a hovering helicopter into Moon Park.

And why not? This was a time of great joy. The Pittsburgh Press was editorializing about the "Moondust Glowing in America's Eyes." The downtown district's "Moonday" shut down offices and some businesses. The Foodland supermarket announced a sale that promised "out-of-this-world specials" to customers: "We've gone lunatic!"

Moon was also the home of Pittsburgh's airport, where soaring into the sky in a metal bird remained a romantic notion. These were still the days when, as TWA once put it, you could climb aboard "super-skyliners" that were "skyclubs by day, skysleepers by night."

We are 40 years older now, we Americans. And many things have changed.

The final Apollo mission came home before Nixon resigned. Skylab fell to Earth. Challenger disintegrated going up, Columbia coming down. Kennedy's New Frontier ethos — space as a kinder, gentler Manifest Destiny — slouched into the "Alien" catchphrase: "In space, no one can hear you scream."

Today, the reasons for Americans to pay attention to the ground, rather than the heavens, can be rattled off like a parody of a Billy Joel song. Terrorists. Global warming. Swine flu. Economic collapse. Nukes in North Korea and mass shootings in the heartland.

In Moon, the old airport is gone; its gleaming replacement opened 16 years ago, one township over. Jets still rumble overhead, but airline ads today skip the romance of the skies and emphasize workaday convenience. "Boundless free snacks," says a Jet Blue billboard on nearby I-279.

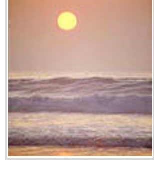
Yet Moon still hopes. In the park, adults eat in the Apollo picnic area while kids cluster in the playground around the spaceship seesaws, the rocket climber, the piece of metal twisted whimsically into an abstract lunar lander. "Explore Our

ADVERTISEMENT

Energy Crisis? Or Opportunity?

Report: 4.2 million new 'green' jobs possible (AP News)

A major shift to renewable energy and efficiency is expected to produce 4.2 million new environmentally friend...



- **Oceans eyed as new energy source** (AP News)
- **Nuclear industry looking for a wave of new hires** (AP News)
- **WIND. THE POWER. THE PROMISE. THE BUSINESS.** (BusinessWeek)

Photography
Obituaries
Crosswords/Sudoku
Your Scene

Blogs
Columnists
Print Edition
Readers Rep
Corrections
All Sections

Buy, Sell & More
Jobs
Cars
latcars
Real Estate
Foreclosure Sale
Rentals
Personals
Local Values
Coupons
Newspaper Ads

Place an Ad
In the Newspaper
Online

Settings/Services
Sign In
Register
E-Mail Newsletters
RSS Feeds
Help
Contact Us
L.A. Times Archives
Reprint Requests
Work for Us

Home Delivery
Customer Support
Subscribe

Own The Times

Universe," the township says, a slogan it introduced in 2004.

But is that something that Americans still desire? Is space, the final frontier, still the American place to aim for? Or when it comes to exploring the stars, was Yogi Berra right when he said that the future ain't what it used to be?

—

"At the frontier, the bonds of custom are broken, and unrestraint is triumphant." So said Frederick Jackson Turner, the 19th-century historian whose ideas showed Americans how important their frontier experience was to them.

"I wanted to be a spaceman — that's what I wanted to be. But now that I am a spaceman, nobody cares about me." So sang Harry Nilsson, the musician who in 1972 channeled the changing feelings about space exploration in this country.

Today, somewhere between those two absurdly different ideas, sits America's attitude about space.

Through the 1950s and 1960s, it was the vast, uncharted place where the American imagination dwelled, pushed by the fear that the Soviets would get there first. The Space Age was everywhere: Even when it was threatening, it was enchanting. Even when it was menacing, it beckoned. Even when it was lampooned ("The Jetsons") or sublimated (car tailfins), it only reflected how deeply entrenched in the culture it truly was.

But today space occupies a very different place in the popular culture.

Our visions of it have become darker, more suspicious, more xenophobic. When a space shuttle launches, many Americans don't really notice unless something goes wrong. In a country defined by its obsession with novelty, often the response is predictably American, the thing that makes us great and weak at the same time: Been there, done that.

We have gone from stirring Kennedy oratory about "landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to the earth" to an ad for Alexia Crunchy Snacks that promises its product is — wait for it — "a giant leap for snackkind."

We have lapped many of yesterday's visions of tomorrow. "Lost in Space" was set in 1997, "Space: 1999" and "2001: A Space Odyssey" in their own obvious years. So many American futures are now in the past.

We have traded optimism — even the more horrific sci-fi of the 1950s generally operated on the presumption that America would, should, engage with space — to the creeping menace manifest in "The X-Files," after which you ended up wishing that anything unearthly would just go away.

Single Page | 1 | 2 | 3 | Next »

POWERED BY sphere

Related stories

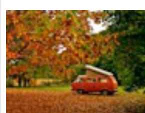
Around the Web

- Buzz Aldrin: Time to boldly go once more | guardian.co.uk

2009 Indian Chief

Up close, the latest iteration of the bike that first debuted in 1922 is stunning. **Video**

New Zealand by VW van



On the Pacific nation's South Island, every day is an adventure, especially if you're in a camper van. **Photos**

Nip, tuck and pony up

Cosmetic surgery spending is back on the upswing.

Weekend box office

"Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince" leads, "Bruno" drops and "500 Days" bows strong.

1. China eagerly prepares for a rare total solar eclipse
2. Almost $100 billion in losses for California's biggest government pension funds
3. Senate sides with Obama, removes F-22 money
4. Governor, legislative leaders begin building support for their budget pact
5. More bodies go unclaimed as families can't afford funeral costs
6. Lance Armstrong and Alberto Contador finish together
7. Taliban claims responsibility for new wave of attacks in Afghanistan
8. Jason Schmidt earns his next paycheck
9. Bernanke: Interest rates will stay very low for a 'very long haul'
10. Budget accord reached

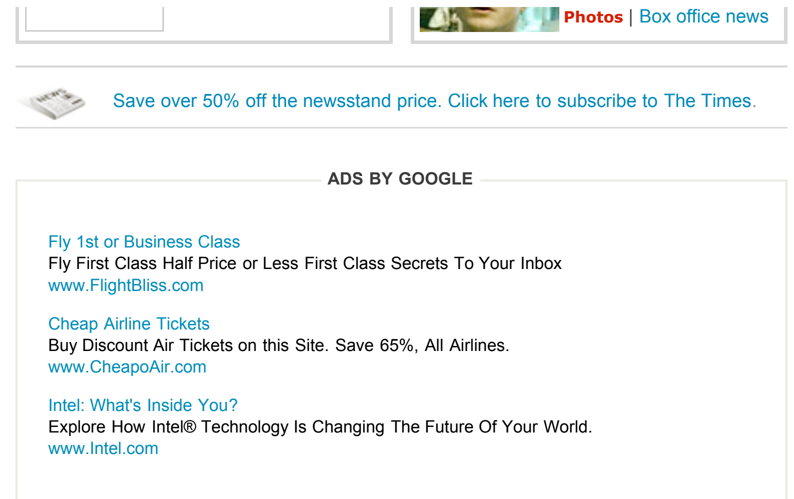
ADVERTISEMENT

World Headlines

1. U.S. increasing counter-narcotics efforts in Afghanistan
2. Israel backs East Jerusalem housing construction despite U.S. opposition
3. Helicopter crash in Afghanistan kills 16 civilian contractors
4. Captors release video of U.S. soldier who went missing in Afghanistan
5. Honduras crisis mediation at an impasse

Q&A: Michael Jackson

Photos | Box office news



VIDEO: Post your questions and get the inside scoop on Michael Jackson's death.

Save over 50% off the newsstand price. Click here to subscribe to The Times.

ADS BY GOOGLE

Fly 1st or Business Class
Fly First Class Half Price or Less First Class Secrets To Your Inbox
www.FlightBliss.com

Cheap Airline Tickets
Buy Discount Air Tickets on this Site. Save 65%, All Airlines.
www.CheapoAir.com

Intel: What's Inside You?
Explore How Intel® Technology Is Changing The Future Of Your World.
www.Intel.com

Copyright 2009 Los Angeles Times

202 West 1st Street, Los Angeles, California, 90012