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With Their Steps Came Great Relief on Earth

Armstrong, Aldrin Quieted 'Moondoggle' Critics, Gave U.S. Space Program Enthusiasm to Reach Even Further

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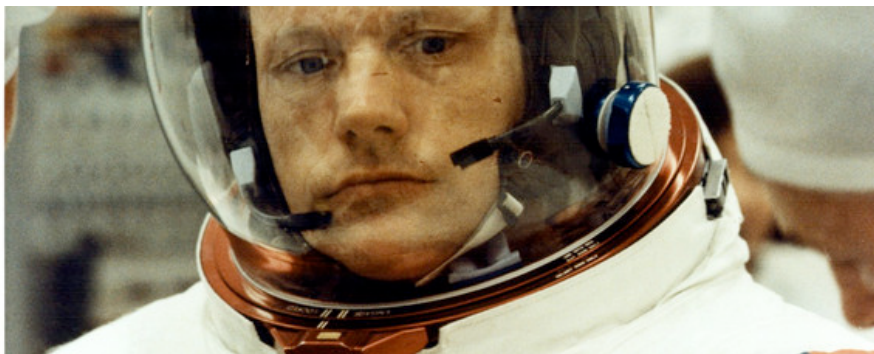
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By CYNTHIA CROSSEN



NASA

Apollo 11 Commander Neil A. Armstrong, suited up here in preparation for a space vehicle countdown, said that the moon "looked friendly to me." Decades later, he remained an ardent supporter of the space program.

In Houston, the screen in the Apollo mission control room showed the text of President John F. Kennedy's vow that Americans would walk on the moon before the end of the 1960s. Projected under it were the words, "Task Accomplished, July 1969."

It was the afternoon of July 20, and Neil Armstrong and Edwin "Buzz" Aldrin had just sunk their feet into the gray lunar dust at the Eagle's landing site. They were some 240,000 miles from home, but more than half a billion earthlings were watching or listening as the two tried to adjust to the sights and airlessness of this mystical land. All around them, Mr. Aldrin said, was "magnificent desolation."

Apollo 11 Astronauts Pitch Mars Mission to Obama

The historic moon landing on July 20, 1969, is seen by many as mankind's greatest scientific achievement, but a couple of astronauts who took that Apollo 11 trip say we can do more. Video courtesy of Fox News.



Mission: Moon

For more than two hours, the two took pictures, collected geologic samples and eventually succeeded in planting the American flag in the moon's inhospitable soil. Then they got home safely. These men -- and the hundreds of thousands of scientists, engineers and managers who had made the moon landing possible -- had accomplished one of the most audacious missions in the annals of exploration. And



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Reuters

Astronaut Edwin "Buzz" Aldrin walked on the moon during the Apollo 11 mission July 20, 1969.

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Looking Back: The First Moon Landing

Journal articles on the U.S. Apollo 11 mission to the moon in 1969.

[U.S. Is Set to Begin Apollo Tests Deemed Crucial in Moon Race](#) (Oct. 8, 1968)

[Flight to the Moon by Three U.S. Astronauts Will Culminate a Decade of Preparation, the Expenditure of \\$24 Billion](#) (July 10, 1969)

[Apollo 11 Flight, if a Success, Points Way to Further Moon Exploration](#) (July 17, 1969)

[Moon Landing Success Is Sure to Spur Planning For New Space Feats](#) (July 22, 1969)

himself among the luckiest men on Earth: "Looking back, we were really very privileged to live in that thin slice of history where we changed how man looks at himself, and what he might

exploration, as Apollo 8 commander Frank Borman once said, "is the essence of the human spirit."

Mr. Armstrong, Mr. Aldrin and a third astronaut, Michael Collins, had blasted out of Cape Kennedy four days earlier, orbited the Earth and moon, and then, for the first time in history, made a (barely) controlled landing on a lunar plain. They arrived, as Mr. Armstrong later pointed out, without weapons; the moon "looked friendly to me," Mr. Armstrong said, "and it proved to be friendly." They left a plaque that read, "We came in peace for all mankind."

The people of a moon-mad world, almost as one, breathed a sigh of relief and felt intoxicated by their own humanity. After Mr. Armstrong's small step and giant leap, it seemed possible that if man could walk on the moon, man could do anything.

There were always critics of the \$25 billion "moondoggle." President Kennedy answered them in a 1962 speech at Rice University. "Many years ago," he said, "the great British explorer George Mallory, who was to die on Mount Everest, was asked why did he want to climb it. He said, 'Because it is there.' Well, space is there, and we're going to climb it, and the moon and the planets are there, and new hopes for knowledge and peace are there."

Another reason for President Kennedy's enthusiasm was that a Russian cosmonaut, Yuri Gagarin, had orbited the earth in April 1961, the first man in space. In the mid-1960s, Congress was willing to spend \$6 billion a year leapfrogging over the Soviet Union to the moon and maybe even Mars.

But the public wasn't convinced: One month before Apollo 11 launched, an opinion poll found that 56% of respondents didn't want their tax dollars used for a space program. (Several years earlier, when Congress complained about the cost of getting a man to the moon, Lyndon Johnson noted that in 1962, America "bet more on horse racing than on space.") But the Vietnam War, antipoverty programs and a recession made lunar exploration a luxury -- the Apollo program, which had put 12 men on the moon, ended in December 1972.

Mr. Armstrong, for one, didn't think the space program was dead. "We don't have the option any longer to say yes or no to it," he said. "We only have the option to say when." And in a 2001 interview, he counted

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become and where he might go."

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