

### **‘How did the US achieve a successful moon landing in 1969 and what was its national and international significance for the US?’ (2019)**

The Moon Landing in 1969 was a statement of American Foreign policy and a huge advancement in technology that impacted both the US domestic and foreign affairs. The moon landing, which was a product of the space race between the ‘superpowers’ America and Russia proved to be a strong political statement in foreign policy and a measure of political reassurance regarding their domestic affairs.

During the Cold War, America felt a sense of competition as their fellow superpower, Russia began to compete in producing deadly weapons and means to deliver them. This was known as the arms race and led to advancement such as the internet and eventually led to the moon landing. The Russian space success surprised the US as they launched their first inter-continental ballistic missile and the first man made earth satellite sputnik in 1957. The US, under Eisenhower set up NASA (the national aeronautics and space administration) in 1958 to organise US space exploration but the Soviets were still ahead when their Luna II rocket hit the moon and Yuri Gagarin became the first man in space. The space race was another aspect of Cold War rivalry.

In 1961, JFK committed the US to landing a man on the moon by the end of the 1960s. He stated that “No single space project in this period will be more impressive to mankind or more important to the long-range exploration of space; and none will be more difficult to accomplish”. The Mercury Programme 1959-1963 flew six manned test flights. As part of the programme, John Glen became the first man to orbit the earth 1962.

The Apollo programme was developed to achieve JFKS aim of “landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to the earth”. Project Mercury was followed by a two man project Gemini which saw the first American “spacewalk” and proved that men could survive a long period of weightlessness. The Apollo missions tested the Saturn rocket, docking the command ship and

the lunar module. To test each step, there were ten Apollo missions before the moon landing. Apollo 7 was disastrous as a fire broke out on the space craft and killed all three men. Later missions were more successful, however.

Apollo 11 had three modules or parts. The command module which was known as Columbia, to carry the astronauts. The service module which was to hold rockets and fuel. The lunar module which was also known as Eagle, to land on the moon. The astronauts practiced in simulators and experienced weightlessness in underwater tanks. These three astronauts were Neil Armstrong who was the commander, Eugene Buzz Aldrin who was the pilot of the lunar module and then Michael Collins who was the pilot of the command module. The three astronauts took off from Kennedy Space Centre in Florida on the 16th of July 1969. Millions watched on television. On the journey, each of the rocket stages was dropped off, or jettisoned once its fuel was used up. Then Collins hooded the command module and attached lunar module on the journey to the Moon. It took three days to reach the Moon.

On the 20th of July, Armstrong and Aldrin took the lunar module to the Moon, landing on the sea of tranquillity as they announced “the eagle had landed”. Armstrong was the first man to step on the Moon. He said “That’s one step for man, one giant leap for mankind”. They walked on the Moon for over twenty hours, setting up scientific experiments and collecting rock samples. They also planted a US flag and a metal plaque, commemorating the landing. The Eagle took off from the Moon and docked with the command module. They returned to earth, protected by a heat shield during their passage through the Earth’s atmosphere. They splashed down in the Pacific Ocean. They were quarantined for twenty-one days.

The significance of the Moon Landing was monumental. There were over 400,000 employed in the Apollo project. The US now led the space race against the USSR. It was a significant victory in the Cold War. The US fulfilled President Kennedy’s commitment. The USSR concentrated on the space stations, instead of the Moon race. Budget cutbacks introduced meant that nobody landed on the Moon since 1972. New information was collected on the formation of the moon. There was a debate about the cost of space exploration and whether the money should have been spent on economic and social problems.