Fly Me to the Moon:
Space, Race, and the American Dream

“I can’t pay no doctor bills but Whitey’s on the moon. Ten years from now I’ll be payin’ still, while Whitey’s on the moon…Was all that money I made last year for Whitey on the moon? How come I ain’t got no money here? Hmm! Whitey’s on the moon…”\(^1\) These are the words to a song by black American artist, Gil Scott-Heron. “Whitey on the Moon” was first released in 1970, the year after the nation’s culminating moment in the space race—the moon walk. Heron’s lyrics represent the disenfranchisement black Americans felt from national identity as reemphasized by the landing of white astronauts, Neil Armstrong and Edwin “Buzz” Aldrin, Jr. on the surface of the moon. They speak of the conflicting priorities understood by the nation as a “unified whole” and those understood by black Americans. In the decade leading up to the Apollo 11 mission, the nation prioritized scientific and military progress through the space race over the domestic issues of poverty and segregation.

The 1960s was a period of incredible turbulence, upheaval, and change in the social and political realms of American culture. It saw the nation still embroiled in a cold war with the Soviet Union that had been ongoing since the 1940s. To promote its image in the world and counter communist propaganda, by the end of the Eisenhower administration, the United States had begun to project positive imagery and symbols of American life,\(^2\) often as represented by the American Dream. The space race provided an ideal platform on which to continue this effort in the fight against communism. 1960s rhetoric represented space as a fulfillment of two

visions of the American Dream based on components of a national identity not open to blacks. The first of these enshrined the mythic frontier, the second—a contemporary suburban lifestyle. In excluding blacks from the American Dream, the Dream lost its meaning, based as it was upon equality, opportunity, and democracy. Yet, ironically, it was used in space discourse to showcase American superiority, thus highlighting its own hypocrisy.

In this paper, I will begin with some background of the Cold War to explain how the United States came to be involved in the space race. Through examination of President Kennedy’s speeches, issues of Life Magazine, and the cartoon television series, The Jetsons, I will show how discourse about the space race was utilized to showcase American superiority. I will then show how space and the space project was represented in American political and cultural spheres as fulfilling differing visions of the American Dream, following first the emergence of the historical vision in space discourse, then the contemporary. The overarching vision was one of freedom, democracy, and equality of opportunity. Two other versions stemmed off of this basic understanding. First was the historical vision, drawn upon by Kennedy and Life to represent the space race as an opportunity to conquer a new frontier. Second was a contemporary vision as seen in Life and The Jetsons, which depicted the future in space as an extension of the nationally idealized suburban nuclear family. In the second half of my paper I will provide context for the black experience in 1960s America and show how blacks were excluded from both of these visions. Then, through demonstrating how Kennedy and The Jetsons framed space and the American Dream as diametrically opposed to Communism, I will argue that this exclusion from the Dream, which constituted America’s essential values and was used in anti-communist rhetoric, exposed the nation’s domestic problems, specifically racial
inequality. Finally, I will address the convergence of blacks and space, and ways in which the nation tried to re-craft its public image.

Before beginning this discussion, it is necessary to define the American Dream as it will be understood in this paper. The American Dream has informed national identity since the country’s conception, yet it is an ambiguous concept. Historian Cal Jillson offers the interpretation that at its most basic, the Dream insists that America is a nation “in which opportunity is available to all and honest hard work yields the chance to succeed and thrive.”

While there are differing interpretations of this notion, this definition provides a framework of the basic essentials. In one offshoot of the concept, American history has connected this Dream to the frontier experience. Though modern historians largely reject the notion, originally forwarded by Frederick Jackson Turner, that the American frontier was essential in the invention of the modern American character and identity, it was generally accepted by the American public until after 1960s historians began to highlight its flaws. The mythic frontier glorifies the pioneering spirit, offering new opportunities for success or the building of one’s fortune. It is intimately linked with the individualistic sense that one’s future and success are one’s own responsibility, and therefore that anyone can get ahead. However, as noted by Jim Cullen in his monograph on the American Dream, this pioneering notion that if one works for it he can improve his standing in the world requires a racial footnote. With black inequality clearly present throughout American history, “upward mobility was understood, even defined, by a

3 Cal Jillson, Pursuing the American Dream: Opportunity & Exclusion over Four Centuries (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 5.
visible alternative of immobility.”

Thus, black Americans were excluded even from the Dream at the heart of the American experience.

The aftermath of World War II saw the crafting of a new understanding of the Dream. Following a decade of economic depression and war, Americans rejected the hard work and penny-pinching ways of their past, seeking ease of living, and transitioned into a possession-centered society of competition, affluence and conformity. This was made possible by the emergence of efficient industrial production on a large scale and wide-spread and effective marketing. For many, the suburbs represented the attainment of this dream. Home ownership was a significant draw as it provided substantial evidence of personal independence, and the suburbs enabled many families who formerly would have been unable to afford a house of their own to purchase one at a reasonable cost. Additionally, the end of the war brought millions of men back into the national workforce, which in their absence had been filled by women. This led to the promotion of a new feminine ideology intended to get women back to the homes by persuading them that they could only be truly fulfilled through the roles of wife and mother.

Thus, the suburbs became closely identified with traditional gender roles and a happy family life. However, while the suburbs enabled many, who would have been previously unable, to own a house, white suburban homeowners and real estate agents did everything within their power to prevent blacks from coming into their developments, an admission which they feared would destroy property values. Additionally, the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) used discriminatory redlining policies to deny mortgages to blacks, effectively preventing the

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integration of the suburbs. In the midst of the space race in the 1960s, historical and contemporary rhetoric of the American Dream was used to represent outer space in the United States. However, the two versions failed to acknowledge the subversion of the theme at its core—that everyone should be granted a fair chance to succeed.

On October 4th, 1957 the news was broadcast on Moscow radio that the Soviet Union had successfully launched Sputnik, the first ever artificial satellite, into orbit. This was startlingly unexpected news for both American scientists and the American public, who had been led by a series of government announcements to believe that the United States would lead the way into space. This incredible technological achievement, though a significant contribution to the field of science, was troubling to the American people in its origins. Their Cold War adversary, the Soviet Union, had accomplished a feat which the United States had not yet the scientific knowledge or capacity to imitate. This led to fears that the Soviets “might be close to perfecting the world’s first intercontinental ballistic missile—an ICBM capable of carrying a nuclear warhead the thousands of miles that separated the two superpowers.”

These Cold War fears and a desire to reestablish dominance or at least regain an equal footing provided impetus to the American space program. The Eisenhower space policy largely focused upon the answering of scientific questions through probes and satellite technology, downplaying the role of humans in space. These satellites enabled military reconnaissance and space-based research, and were significantly cheaper than manned spaceflight. Then in April of 1961, Russian cosmonaut, Yuri Gagarin became the first man in space, embarrassing the United States even further. It was

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10 Divine, xv.
not until Eisenhower’s successor, President John F. Kennedy, took office that manned programs moved forward. With persuasive rhetoric, Kennedy, in his May 25, 1961 speech before the joint session of Congress, declared his intent that the United States would be leaders in the space age. “I believe that this nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before this decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to the earth,” Kennedy proclaimed.12 Thus the young president publically established the nation’s mission in the space race.

The Historical Dream

America as a Frontier

Prior to laying out this specific national goal for space exploration, Kennedy presented in his address to the Democratic National Convention the concept of a New Frontier, advancing the historically popular notion of the American Dream. Kennedy spoke directly to the American public, saying, “I’m asking each of you to be pioneers towards that New Frontier.”13 Using the pioneer vocabulary, he asked listeners to recall a former part of American history during which Americans displayed incredible tenacity and endurance to reach the Western frontier. In so doing, he called upon the nation to acknowledge its historical and patriotic duty to itself. This recollection of the determination and progressive spirit of exploration embodied in the United States’ national ancestors further emphasized the existence of the American Dream within the U.S. space program. In his address to Rice University on the space effort, Kennedy said, “this country of the United States was not built by those who waited and rested and wished to look behind them. This country was conquered by those who moved forward—and so will space.”14

Again here, Kennedy drew upon the nation’s historical past, celebrating the embrace of danger, determination, and progress. A failure to forge ahead and lead the world into outer space would be a dishonor to the legacy of the national forebears.

**Astronauts as Pioneers**

The cultural as well as the political representations of the space race glorified the historical American Dream. In issues of *Life Magazine* from the 1960s, astronauts were labeled American heroes, painting the image of a noble group conquering the vast new frontier of outer space. Articles emphasized their roles as explorers and the difficulties and dangers they would endure in their voyage beyond the Earth’s atmosphere. In the March 3, 1961 issue, there was an exclusive article on the three men chosen to be the first American Astronauts into space. The article was subtitled, “New Astronaut Team, Varied Men with One Goal, Poise for the Violent Journey,” and goes on to characterize their mission as “a stern dangerous pursuit.”

By assessing the astronauts’ mission in such terms, the heroism of their endeavor is heightened and they become almost mythologized, again associated with the American heroes of the past that bravely faced unknown dangers to conquer the new frontier. In the article’s profile on astronaut Lieutenant Colonel John Glenn, he is quoted as saying, “People are afraid of the future, of the unknown. If a man faces up to it and takes the dare of the future, he can have some control over his destiny.”

The challenge held in these words encapsulates the image forwarded by Kennedy that space exploration was a fulfillment of the American legacy of pioneering. De Witt Douglas Kilgore, in his study of “astrofuturism,” effectively expressed the idea, writing that beginning in the 1960s, outer space served America “as the west served the nation in its past: it is the terrain onto which a manifest destiny is projected, a new frontier invalidating the 1893 closure of the

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western terrestrial frontier.” By portraying astronauts as pioneers and American heroes, Life brought Kennedy’s historical rhetoric into the cultural sphere. It was not just Life that painted a heroic picture of the American astronauts. Other magazines and journals took the same angle. Following the selection of the seven American Mercury astronauts, Time magazine issued an article tying the men explicitly with other heroes of American history. It read, “from a nation of 175 million, they stepped forward last week: seven men cut of the same stone as Columbus, Magellan, Daniel Boone, Orville and Wilbur Wright.” Evidently, the association drawn between the new astronauts and the nation’s historical past was not confined to Kennedy and Life, but enjoyed a more general acceptance.

The Contemporary Dream

Life’s Astronauts as Family Men

Despite this level of agreement between political and cultural rhetoric, popular media did not exclusively represent space in the context of Kennedy’s democratic, pioneering vision. It also advanced a different notion of the “American Dream” in space, one reflecting the particular way the American Dream was envisioned in Postwar America. This was evidenced in the discursive displacement of suburbia into outer space. While the space project was heralded as a mission of advancement and boundary stretching, it seemed that certain traditional American notions and hierarchies were simply being relocated into the realm of outer space, particularly ideas of family and gender roles. Sure enough, cultural forums identified the space race with the American Dream, as put forth implicitly by Kennedy’s rhetoric. However, this cultural vision was a postwar realization of the American Dream as represented by the suburbs. This narrow view emphasized the nuclear family, material comfort, gender roles, and homogenized middle

class whiteness, all offered as representative of the individual freedoms available to American citizens. In the August 3, 1962 issue of *Life Magazine*, the cover featured Major Bob White of the U.S. Airforce, the first man to go into space in a jet plane. The cover story explicitly identified White as, “the nation’s newest space hero,” and featured photographs of him with his wife, Pamela, and their three young children. Even the cover photograph was one of White enthusiastically greeting his son after completing his flight. This portrayal of the “space hero” as a family man was typical of *Life* articles about astronauts throughout the era. By presenting the Whites as an ideal American family, traditional notions of the American Dream were extended into space. Such framing made the complexities of space reporting more relatable. As Spigel notes, “Discussions of domesticity made space familiar by offering a down-to-earth context for the often-abstract reasoning behind space flights.” This was a typical approach taken by the magazine. In her study of *Life Magazine*’s portrayal of America, Wendy Kozol examines the ways in which this picture magazine framed issues and news to represent the nation. It was the first nationally consumed publication to present the contemporary world predominantly through photographs. She argues that “Life’s contribution, then, was to focus on the representative middle-class family in news stories to signify a national cultural identity.” Cultural resources like *Life* became the creators and designers of the American identity—what defined the nation and how it wished to be perceived. Their construction was a narrow one, focusing on a specific prototype (the nuclear suburban family) to the general exclusion of difference.

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22 Kozol, 12.
In the 1961 article about the first three astronauts chosen for space, the first profile, on John Glenn, evaluated the astronaut explicitly as “a family man.” Then, in the context of Glenn’s family life, traditional gender roles were reinforced through a quote from his wife Annie. In reference to her husband’s choice to live alone in his officer’s quarters during the week, she said, “I think it’s been good for John to be alone…to work out his studies and get a good night’s sleep. This way he doesn’t have the worries of when to order more wood or when to fix the front door.” Her assessment of the situation calls attention to Glenn’s status as a typical head of the household. In the November 1, 1963 issue, the 14 newest astronauts were unveiled, and notably, the marital status of each was commented on, with particular emphasis on the lone bachelor of the program. With the critical gaze focused so closely upon the family life of each astronaut, it seems clear that these American heroes were being packaged as the embodiment of the ideal American, pushing homogenous images of the white, middle-class, nuclear family, a depiction that was extended to popular television entertainment.

**The Jetsons: Displaced Suburbia**

The 1960s cartoon television series, *The Jetsons*, expanded its interpretation of the “American Dream” to reflect a more recent cultural understanding. Centering on the space age George Jetson and his family, the show depicts a vision of humanity’s future in space, complete with robots, jetpacks, and other futuristic gadgets. It simply relocates the suburban tradition into outer space, envisioning the future as a mere displacement of contemporary America. In the pilot episode of the first season, “Rosey the Robot,” which aired September 23, 1962, traditional gender roles were in plain sight, though with a futuristic twist. In the world of the Jetsons, all

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24 Ibid., 26.
26 For a visual representation of the show’s mere displacement of the traditional suburban family into outer space, see Fig. 1 on Appendix 1.
chores and housework are managed by the push of a button, tasks relegated to the wife and mother, Jane. When the machine that made dinner for them malfunctioned, George criticized his wife, complaining, “When we first got married you could punch out a breakfast like my mom used to make. Now you’re all thumbs!” This is a clear display of the gendered spheres of living symptomatic of 1950s and early 1960s American suburbia. The man functions within the outside realm as the worker and breadwinner, while the woman presides over the domestic sphere, in charge of all things family and home-related. George is here clearly acknowledging that it is his wife’s role to cook, as it was his mother’s role in his youth. Jane later complains to herself, “If he only knew how I hate washing, ironing and vacuuming…housework gets me down.” Though this could be viewed as a criticism of traditional gender roles in its acknowledgement of the dissatisfaction of the suburban housewife, the fact that all of Jane’s housework required only the press of a few buttons may alternately present a critique of laziness and imply that women should have had no problem accomplishing all the tasks to which culture had assigned them. Through such popular media reinforcements of tradition as this, a cultural understanding of outer space as American was established. The space project was associated with the American Dream, but the Dream as represented by a contemporary, homogenized, middle-class, white, suburban ideal of family and gendered spheres. It expressed this suburban image as a fulfillment of the individual freedoms celebrated in America and presented a mere transplant of this social microcosm into outer space.

**Black Exclusion**

For black Americans, the 1960s saw an escalation both of racial violence and of black resistance. The Civil Rights Movement was at its peak during this period. In fact, within issues

28 ““Rosey the Robot.”
of *Life* Magazine, articles covering the space project were often directly juxtaposed with those covering civil rights efforts or racial violence, prompting readers to view the two in conjunction. In the September 27, 1963 issue *Life* introduced the nine most recent additions to the American astronaut team. It featured pictures and descriptions of their training regimen as well as profiles and photographs of the astronauts with their families. Each of these photographs showed cheerful, white, apparently middle-class families in domestic settings—\(^{29}\) the essential Americans enjoying all the freedoms that the nation had to offer (see Fig. 2). Then, just three pages later, is a starkly grim photograph of a young black girl in a hospital bed with patches over her eyes. To the left of the picture were the words of Birmingham lawyer, Charles Morgan Jr., condemning the racist bombing of a “Birmingham Negro church,” which put this girl in the hospital and killed her sister along with three other young black girls.\(^ {30}\) The astronauts are depicted in the comfortable settings of their own homes, safe, happy, and contented but for the desire to explore the cosmos. The little black girl is shown in close-up, alone in a hospital bed, now blind in a world dangerous to people with her skin color. For some in America, there was no freedom from fear and danger, even within the supposed haven of a church. As a level of basic security and comfort must exist before one can dedicate any thought to the future or abstract concepts, it is almost unbelievable that space exploration was even a possibility in the world of this little girl. It seems impossible that these two so incompatible news stories could have been occurring at the same time in the same country. Clear in this juxtaposition was the fact that while America was seeking to break boundaries and cross into the newest frontier, utilizing the rhetoric of American freedom and democracy, it was dealing with racial hatred and violence on the domestic front that glaringly contradicted the values it espoused.


Furthermore, blacks were conspicuously excluded from the space program itself. Certainly, black Americans were not ignorant of this exclusion. The October 1962 issue of *Ebony* magazine acknowledged both the label of “ideal American” attached to astronauts and the absence of black representation in the national space project. An editorial, “In the Same Boat,” compared the plight of women and blacks in the inequality of the space program. Showing a photograph of black comic, Nipsey Russell, holding up a recent cover of *Life*, which featured the Mercury Seven (see Fig. 3), the editorial commented, “[an] astronaut represents the cream of America, her ultimate in physical fitness, intelligence and progress. The picture is that of seven white men who had gone off and left the country's most hated and her most loved minorities: Negroes and women.”

The article critiqued the *Life* magazine cover as a presentation of that exclusive American ideal only open to a specific demographic. The representation of these men as American heroes pointed to the fact that the vast majority of the population was not eligible to become such a hero themselves. The space craze was sweeping the entire nation, not just white American males, and exclusion from such a strong point of nationalistic fervor appeared as just one more example of injustice within the country. The ancestors of black Americans had been forced into this country against their will, and now their descendants were being given no place in either vision of the “American Dream.” Excluded from suburban neighborhoods and excluded from the opportunities for adventure and exploration offered by the space program, blacks were entirely shut off from America’s imagined space age future. Spigel claims that, having already been beaten into space by the Soviets, the Kennedy administration “decided to sell its space program through its symbolic rather than technical feats.”

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31 “In the Same Boat,” *Ebony*, October 1962, 72-73.
exclusion of blacks from America’s space age future was detrimental to the success of the space race itself, as it undermined the symbolism of America’s forwarded space ethos.

**Kennedy’s Space as Anti-Communist**

Following the unexpected launch of Sputnik I, America threw itself into the space race with renewed vigor, developing a space ethos that glorified America and its values. Posed in direct opposition to the U.S.S.R. and the Soviet space program, President Kennedy sought to redefine space travel as based upon freedom and democracy—essentially American values.\(^{33}\)

This oppositional framing is evident in Kennedy’s acceptance speech at the 1960 Democratic National Convention. Having referenced outer space as an area beyond the New Frontier, he said that America must prove “whether this nation, conceived as it is with its freedom of choice, its breadth of opportunity, its range of alternatives, can compete with the single-minded advance of the Communist system.”\(^{34}\) Thus it seems that the space race was conceived by the Kennedy Administration as an ideologically valuable tool in convincing the world of the superiority of American capitalism to communism,\(^{35}\) a notion reinforced by James C. Fletcher during a national meeting of the American Astronautical Society in August of 1965. In his words, a major portion of the American mission in the space race was “to communicate not only to our own people, but to those in less developed countries that a free society is a prosperous society.”\(^{36}\) In this statement, the United States’ economic prosperity was attributed to its claimed value of democratic freedom. It is here implied that freedom, democracy, and capitalism all go hand-in-hand, suggesting that America’s predominance proceeds from factors distinctly un-Soviet.

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\(^{33}\) Spigel, “Outer Space,” 147.

\(^{34}\) Kennedy (speech at the DNC), www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/jfk1960dnc.htm., (accessed October 31, 2011)

\(^{35}\) Spigel, “Outer Space,” 147.

The Jetsons: Space as Anti-Communist

Kennedy’s vision was further reflected in cultural forums, as seen in episodes of the The Jetsons. Like Kennedy, the show framed space as American in its opposition to the Soviet Union. Interestingly, the series imagined space in an exclusively American light. In episode 20 of the first season, “Miss Solar System,” Jane, George’s wife, entered as a contestant in a beauty contest. The other contestants represented other planets and galactic debris. Jane, however, went by the highly specific name of Miss Western Hemisphere, and introduced her talent as an “American folk ballad that has been passed down for generations.” She then broke into a version of Hughie Cannon’s 1902 jazz standard, “Bill Bailey, Won’t You Please Come Home,” re-worded “Won’t You Fly Home, Bill Spacely?” Thus, rather than representing the future of earth as a whole in space, merely the Western half of the world was addressed, specifically the United States. In such a way, the East, most notably the Soviet Union, was conspicuously neglected, forwarding the agenda advanced by the Kennedy administration that conceived of the future of space as dominantly American. In Episode 19, “G.I. Jetson,” George was instructed to report for training as a private in the Space Guard Reserves. The notification came to the Jetsons’ home as an audio message which said, “Western universe, Western universe, teletape for Mr. Jetson.” The teletape then informed him that he had two minutes to put his affairs in order, and then he must report to Camp Nebula. As in “Miss Solar System,” the “East” was conspicuously neglected in this episode. While no specific conflict or enemy was mentioned in the episode, the fact that a distinction was made identifying this particular military force with the “Western universe” implicitly suggested that the enemy must be the Eastern universe, as that was all that remained. Again here, the East (which can be assumed to allude to communist forces in

Vietnam, China, and the Soviet Union) was labeled as “the other.” This indicated that there was no celebration of the future of earth as a whole in space, but that nationalistic sympathies were to be displaced into space and that the Anglo-Americans (Westerners) were the good guys.

On the one hand, cultural and administrational representations of space (as evidenced by Kennedy’s speeches, Life Magazine and The Jetsons) overlapped in their identification of outer space with the “American Dream,” as a part of a national identity. However, this surface-level consensus was undercut by the discrepancy between their public words and their domestic actions. Through the public conversation about space, this tension was unintentionally accentuated, revealing inconsistencies within the American rhetoric being used to discuss space and the realities of American society. Some representations pushed for progress and movement towards a new frontier. Others glorified contemporary conventions, viewing the future in space as more high tech, but essentially the same. Though represented as essentially American and a rallying point for American pride, the space race rhetoric did not account for the disparities between the imagery that was presented and the fact of racial inequality in America. As inspirational and innovative as political space rhetoric sounded, set against popular media, it unintentionally drew attention to a certain level of hypocrisy in the United States. The United States posited its superiority to the U.S.S.R. on the grounds of American freedom, equality, and democracy, yet these principles did not hold even for all of America’s own citizens. Those ideals identified as essentially American were pronouncedly absent from the black American experience.

Re-crafting the Public Image

As the United States’ conflict with the Soviet Union was a cold war, image and symbolism were vitally important to the efforts of each nation. Any visible hypocrisy or internal
conflict would be damaging to the United States’ image abroad, which could, at its worst, according to historian Elaine Tyler May, “strengthen the Soviet Union, and weaken the nation, making it vulnerable to communism.” With the space race putting an additional spotlight on the nation, thus highlighting internal conflict and the hypocrisy of American society, one would assume that the United States would attempt to combat this negative image within the site of the attention, the space program itself. But on the contrary, NASA only employed one black astronaut, and this was a public relations move to quell the outpouring of accusations of racism. As Spigel explains,

NASA continued to respond to racism charges by pointing to its integrated workforce and eventually by appointing one black man, Maj. Robert Lawrence Jr., to the astronaut program. Nevertheless, the space project still implicitly endorsed a scientific culture based on segregation, a culture that mimicked the racial division of populations back on earth.40

The efforts NASA made to diversify the space program fell far short of the goal and seemed almost to amplify the racist and unequal nature of both the space project and the nation.

Criticism of the Soviet communist way of life lost a great deal of its power in light of America’s failure to extend the equality it proclaimed as an ideal to African-American citizens. As historian Thomas Borstelmann writes in his work about race relations during the Cold War, “competitiveness with the Soviet Union highlighted the hypocrisy of American racism amid U.S. claims to leadership of the free world,”41 a fact that could not be denied during a period of heightened racial violence. In fact, the hypocrisy was made known through Soviet propaganda. Walter Hixson informs us that, “psychological warriors identified race relations as an ‘Achilles heel,’ ruthlessly exploited by the Soviets among the peoples of the world, most of whom were

39 May, 9.  
themselves ‘colored.’”42 In an interesting attempt to alleviate this embarrassing disparity and ameliorate the image of the United States’ racism abroad, President Eisenhower sent popular black American jazz musicians on a public relations world tour. Hoping to counter the Soviet charges of American racism, the jazz campaign was intended to promote these African-American artists as symbols of racial equality, which, ironically, was not yet a reality.43 While this irony was not lost on the musicians, they managed to use the opportunity to their advantage, using “the State Department jazz tours as a global platform from which to promote the dignity of black people and their culture in the United States and abroad.”44

Outer space presented a peculiar problem for American notions of race and hierarchy. The very universality of space called into question the prospects for blacks in space, and how their social status would be transferred. The fact that race and color were completely ignored both in political and cultural representations of a future in space begged the question: Would black Americans’ restricted rights be transplanted into space or would space as an un-owned wilderness be a blank slate in which all humans were re-set as equals? Though Article XI of the International Astronautical Federation’s Moon Treaty states that the moon is “the common heritage of mankind,” not only was it moon-specific, but it was not established until 1979, and in fact has yet to be ratified by the United States.45 Outer space travel necessitated the establishment of some international legislation to govern this newly available space of common heritage. The Naval War College’s Law Studies volume 55 outlines the background,

42 Hixson, 129.
44 Von Eschen, 256.
development and issues of the International Law of Outer Space. In its discussion of equitable principles in the development of international space law, it states,

Discussions in the United Nations have made it clear that outer space must be used for the benefit of all mankind, and that such benefits must be made available to resource and nonresource nations alike. There is also general consensus that space benefits must be as broadly and equitable distributed as possible.\(^{46}\)

The even distribution of benefits discussed here extended to all nations, whether or not they were contributing resources in the name of the space effort. Obviously, all these nations of all mankind represent a huge span of racial makeup. As such, it follows that the United States would be forced to deal with the discrepancy manifested in its domestic racial inequality in order to legitimately participate in this international law without hypocrisy. Following the moon landing in 1969, *Ebony* printed an editorial in response to the feat. It questioned what the United States would have to say for itself were it to contact extraterrestrial life forms, asking, “Are they going to admit that the people of a nation such as the United States cannot get along because some are black and some are white?” It then goes on to say, “Mankind today has proved that it can do just about whatever it wants to do. It can bring equality to all men in “one giant leap” if it really wants to… But mankind won't do any of these things.”\(^{47}\) Such commentary echoes that of the anger and resentment in Gil-Scott Heron’s response to the Apollo 11 moon landing.

The administration recognized that outside forces were pushing them to solve the problem of racial inequality in their country. In a memo to two black rights advocates, one of Kennedy’s aides, Frederick Dutton, wrote, “The dynamics both here and abroad compelling desegregation in this country are accelerating. How to provide leadership for those forces and to moderate Southern difficulties without destroying the [Democratic] Congressional coalition at


\(^{47}\) “Giant Step for Mankind?” *Ebony*, September 1, 1969, 58.
mid-term is the nub of the problem.”

Thus, while racial progress was proving to be a complicated and difficult order, the President and his aides were fully aware of the damage that racial discrimination and hypocrisy was wreaking upon the nation’s image abroad.

Through different presentations of the “American Dream,” the government and cultural forums framed the space project as revolutionary and traditional, as part of a national historical legacy and a contemporary extension of America’s suburban ideal. The lack of consensus about what fulfilled America’s foundational creed created a tension which highlighted problems existing within domestic American society. Though both political rhetoric and cultural understanding represented space involvement as exemplary of the American Dream, respectively heroically adventurous and domestically suburban—black Americans were excluded from both understandings of this Dream. The variety of interpretations and failure to reach a common and inclusive understanding of what constituted the national identity served to undermine those overarching essentials that inform every vision of the American Dream: democracy, freedom, and equality. In excluding blacks from the historical and contemporary visions of the Dream, as expressed both by the President and popular media in their depictions of outer space, these essential tenets of the national identity lost all efficacy and meaning, damaging the national image America sought to promote. It was this hypocrisy, when contrasted with the nation’s professed goals, that provoked critical thought and evaluation as to what America stood for and what the implications were for a future in space. The external pressures brought on by the hypocrisy may also have contributed to administrative progress in the Civil Rights Movement. Such a global undertaking demanded critical evaluation on the individual state level. The Civil

Rights Movement, which had been going on for many years, may have exposed the inequalities of American society, but this was largely ignored until there came a need for the nation to represent itself on a global scale, necessitating an introspective look.
Appendix 1

Fig. 1
Astronaut James McDivitt and his family in their car; George Jetson and his family in their space-age version of a car.


Fig. 2
Astronaut Jim Lovell with wife and children


Fig. 3
The Mercury Astronauts

Ralph Morse, “1959 LIFE Magazine cover featuring the seven original Mercury astronauts,” http://www.achievement.org/autodoc/graphic/achievement/ed}
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