



Space and the American Imagination

By Howard E. McCurdy

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People dreamed of cosmic exploration?winged spaceships and lunar voyages; space stations and robot astronauts?long before it actually happened. *Space and the American Imagination* traces the emergence of space travel in the popular mind, its expression in science fiction, and its influence on national space programs.

Space exploration dramatically illustrates the power of imagination. Howard E. McCurdy shows how that power inspired people to attempt what they once deemed impossible. In a mere half-century since the launch of the first Earth-orbiting satellite in 1957, humans achieved much of what they had once only read about in the fiction of Jules Verne and H. G. Wells and the nonfiction of Willy Ley.

Reaching these goals, however, required broad-based support, and McCurdy examines how advocates employed familiar metaphors to excite interest (promising, for example, that space exploration would recreate the American frontier experience) and prepare the public for daring missions into space. When unexpected realities and harsh obstacles threatened their progress, the space community intensified efforts to make their wildest dreams come true.

This lively and important work remains relevant given contemporary questions about future plans at NASA. Fully revised and updated since its original publication in 1997, *Space and the American Imagination* includes a reworked introduction and conclusion and new chapters on robotics and space commerce.

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Editorial Review

From Library Journal

The popular image of spaceflight has historically drawn on American cultural ideals such as the endless frontier, the heroic explorer, and faith in progress through technological advancement. This masterly study by McCurdy (coeditor of *Spaceflight and the Myth of Presidential Leadership*, LJ 10/15/97) examines the role that imagination and popular culture played in the formulation of national space policy that eventually sent Apollo astronauts to the moon in 1969. Unfortunately for space boosters, the reality of space exploration has fallen far short of the promised vision of lunar bases or manned interplanetary flight. McCurdy concludes that space advocates need to create new images to attract public and government support or witness the end of manned space flight. His thought-provoking analysis is highly recommended for large public and academic libraries. —Thomas J. Frieling, Bainbridge Coll., Ga.
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Review

A very useful study for those interested in fictions about space travel and exploration.

(*Science Fiction Studies*)

An interesting work for all space fans.

(*Choice*)

About the Author

Howard E. McCurdy is a professor in the School of Public Affairs at American University; author of *Faster, Better, Cheaper: Low-Cost Innovation in the U.S. Space Program*, *Inside NASA: High Technology and Organizational Change in the U.S. Space Program*, and *The Space Station Decision: Incremental Politics and Technological Choice*; and coauthor of *Robots in Space: Technology, Evolution, and Interplanetary Travel*, all published by Johns Hopkins.

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