

Kennedy, John F Encyclopedia Article

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Kennedy, John F

U.S. President 1917-1963

John F. Kennedy is often touted as a champion of space exploration and for good reason. It was he who challenged the United States to put the first man on the Moon. His motives were probably political, not visionary.

The world situation for the young president was tense. The Cold War with the Soviet Union was heating up. Kennedy believed that countries were aligning themselves with the most powerful nation. To be that nation, the president felt the United States needed to show its superiority in a particular arena. As a senator he had voted to kill the space program. As president he had told the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) that he would not approve new funding for the Apollo program. But Kennedy was so shaken when the Soviet Union launched Yuri Gagarin as the first human in space, in April 1961, that he consulted with Wernher von Braun, the premier rocket expert at the time, for a goal at which the United States could beat the Soviet Union. With the United States having only fifteen minutes of suborbital flight experience and having yet to design a rocket that could leave Earth orbit, he challenged the nation "before the decade is out, to put a man on the moon and return him safely to Earth." America rose to the challenge, and Apollo 11 landed on the Moon on July 20, 1969.

During his historic message to Congress on May 25, 1961, President John F. Kennedy stated that the United States would move forward with a program to land a man on the Moon by 1970.

See Also

Apollo (Volume 3);; Moon (Volume 2);; Nasa (Volume 3); Von

Bibliography

Reeves, Richard. *President Kennedy: Profile of Power*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993.