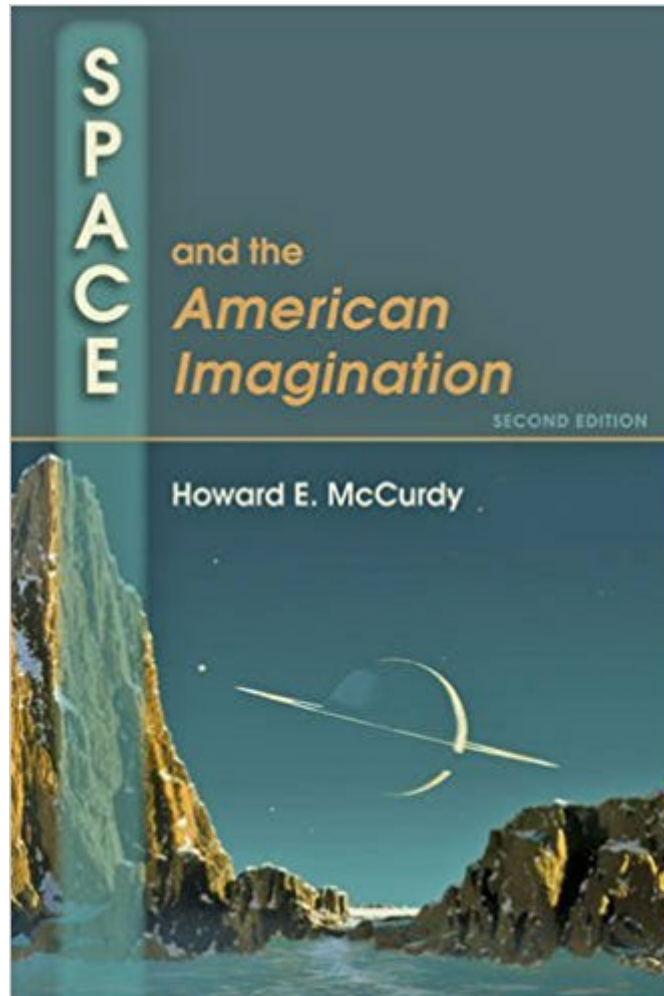




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# Space And The American Imagination



## Synopsis

People dreamed of cosmic exploration—powered by 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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

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. Copyright 1997 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"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)

This excellent book summarizes the political and cultural factors that led to how and why the U.S. space program developed. Just because something can be done technologically doesn't mean it will be. In McCurdy's words, "between the discovery and the invention lies the imagination" - people have to visualize a possibility as credible before sufficient support or will can be summoned to create the institutions or policies needed to actually do it. McCurdy gives an illuminating overview of the development of the U.S. space program and specific areas of why certain paths were chosen and others not. While people may know many of these basic facts, the author puts it into a historical/sociological/cultural context that sheds new light on why things happened the way they did. And although he doesn't address it explicitly, there are obvious implications for what to do and not to do for those who hope we can return to the next great phase of human exploration of space. The tone is scholarly and dispassionate without being off-putting to the interested lay reader. And it also avoids post-modern mumbo-jumbo while still being a very solid and modern analysis. Some reviewers have criticized the book's structure (finding it meandering) but I didn't at all - perhaps because I read the new revised 2011 edition (?). Highly recommended and definitely worth a read.

I must agree with the popular critical review for this text. The overall message is average, definitely not work I'd expect from such a well known scholar. The sections of this book are laden with spelling errors, missing words, and repeat words. From the start there is a constant battle between the

content and undergraduate presentation. Unlike Launius, I do not find the information in this book revolutionary. The content would fit better, reduced to only necessary information, in a magazine article. I'd take Launius' review with a grain of salt. He co-authored a book with McCurdy titled *Robots in Space* a few years before McCurdy released *Space and the American Imagination*. There should have been some better editing. A second edition with much of the fluff removed and editing would be welcome in my collection.

This book covers a topic I have long been interested in -- and does it in a comprehensive and interesting way. It is a fascinating read that provides valuable insight into the transition from science fiction into science fact, and explores the mindset of the American landscape along the way. *Space cadets* and *Space explores* alike. Price, but a valuable read for those interested in this important aspect of the great space race to the stars.

McCurdy explores the space age by explaining its relationship to popular culture. He explains how and why public opinion shaped the space age, as well as how the space age shaped public opinion. Plus he examines how American history, both real and romanticized, shaped our culture. He makes many references to literature, television, and movies, making it a book everyone can relate to at least a little bit. I would have given it 5 stars, but he does go off subject sometimes and leaves you not quite sure where he's going.

McCurdy, *Space and the American Imagination* A very interesting and entertaining book, but it was spoiled for me by the sheer number of misspellings and instances of bad grammar.

You'd think the Smithsonian Institution would have more pride in their publications than to publish a book so poorly copy edited and proofread. By the way, no matter how many times you use it, "reenforce" is not a word. Other mistakes: The alien invader in the 1951 film *The Thing* was most definitely not

"carrot-shaped"; it was clearly humanoid in appearance. "The first Apollo astronauts to circle the Moon returned with images of a crescent Earth rising above lunar plains." p. 227. Actually, the earth was more than half-full. "Phenomenon" is the singular, "phenomena" the plural form -- not the other way around! Several instances of this mistake.

Actually, spaceflight seems to be generally popular with Americans, but not a high priority for most. Commitment to it, therefore, is widespread but not deep. This book seeks to understand and explain the relationship of space exploration to the larger popular culture. It is one of several recent works to do so in a serious way in recent years, and clearly the most important of all of them. "Space and the American Imagination" presents a significant analysis of the interplay between popular culture and public policy. Howard McCurdy concludes that how closely the dominant trends in science fiction literature and film, as well as public perceptions, reinforce actual events in spaceflight fundamentally affects public support for spaceflight. McCurdy notes that during the 1950s and 1960s the relationship between reality and perceptions drew tightly together and created an expectation that allowed the accomplishment of the lunar landings. Since that era, the paths of public perceptions and actual events has diverged. A challenging interpretation that requires skepticism but also continued consideration, McCurdy has demarked an important area of consideration that will keep scholars working for years testing his hypotheses. This is a highly recommended book!

The book shows you the battle between what we can do with science and what we want to do. It starts with a short history of rockets and the idea of space exploration than moves swiftly into the mid and late 20th century. The book allows you to see the huge rift between what people wanted and what governments could deliver. Its about the many sided battle between politics of leadership, military goals, dreams of a new frontier and a more limited, but maybe mature vision. It deals with the cold war, space stations, rocket ships and even the search for life in space. Any person interested in the space race between the US and the USSR or the space programs of the USA should read this book.

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