

Riley McIntosh

Cardinal Newman High School

Oxford Scholars

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The Assassination of JFK and the Space Race

John F. Kennedy is one of the most well-remembered and influential presidents in the history of the United States despite his presidency being cut short by his assassination after only three years. Even today, Kennedy is remembered for his many accomplishments during a pivotal time period which led to events that are vital to the fabric of US history, such as the Cold War, Vietnam War, Civil Rights, and the space race. His life and achievements continue to impact our world today in many ways, and he is remembered today for his many presidential accomplishments including his impact on the space race. At the time, the space race was at the front of many Americans' minds. President Kennedy's role in the space race and the effect of his assassination on the space race affected people of the time and continues to affect us today.

The space race was a pivotal event in US history that lasted from around 1955 until around 1975. It all started with both the USSR and the United States announcing their intentions to launch a satellite into space. Just two years later, the USSR succeeded in launching Sputnik 1, which was the first satellite to orbit Earth. This sparked a heated battle between the two nations. The USSR then sent the first man to space in April 1961, forcing the United States to catch up to their technological capabilities. In May 1961, Kennedy gave the space race a defined goal, to be the first to send a man to the moon. He said "this nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before the decade is out, of landing a man on the Moon and returning him safely to the earth." and asked Congress to commit seven to nine billion more of their budget to fund the race

to the moon. Then, in 1969, the US succeeded by sending the first man to the moon, displaying the United States' technological capabilities.

Though the space race lasted for approximately two decades and several presidents, the president most known for their contribution to and promotion of the space race is President John F. Kennedy. He invigorated an entire nation toward the common goal of landing a man on the moon. Even after his death, his work allowed this mission to be carried on by his successors, Lyndon B. Johnson and Richard Nixon. Kennedy's words held great power, and he used this to remind the citizens of the United States of their capability to land a man on the moon and of the importance of achieving this goal. In his address in Rice Stadium on September 12, 1962, President Kennedy stated, "We choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other things not because they are easy, but because they are hard. Because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we're willing to accept." In response, the public rallied in support of NASA and the Apollo project, convincing the United States government to commit 25 billion dollars to the space program, which is equivalent to around 100 billion dollars today.

In 1963, just a month before his assassination, Kennedy spoke to the United Nations General Assembly to propose a joint moon landing with the Soviet Union. President Kennedy said, "The Soviet Union and the United States, together with their allies, can achieve further agreement- agreement which springs from our mutual interest in avoiding mutual destruction." He spoke of working together with the USSR rather than against them to forge a path towards peace and the discovery of a new frontier, outer space, together.

Then, tragically, Kennedy was assassinated just over a month later on November 22, 1963, before he ever got the chance to see this new plan through. Many who were alive at the

time remember exactly where they were and what they were doing when they found out that he had been violently assassinated in a parade through Dallas, Texas. My grandfather remembers being in his freshman-year algebra class when the principal came over the loudspeaker to announce the death of President Kennedy. This was an event that stunned people across the nation and is still remembered by all who were alive at the time.

If Kennedy had not been assassinated, this dream of a joint manned mission to Mars might have become a reality. JFK wanted to create peace between the United States and the Soviet Union saying, “Why, therefore, should man’s first flight to the moon be a matter of national competition?”. Kennedy, it seems, was beginning to doubt that a battle between these two nations was the correct path to achieving the American dream of landing a man on the moon. When John F. Kennedy was assassinated this hope for peace between the two nations and the end of the Cold War died along with him. Instead, the fight to ‘beat’ the USSR to the moon was advocated for even more by the American people in an effort to uphold the legacy left behind by their beloved President. An early end to the Cold War was swept to the side, and all the energy of the United States was focused on being the first to land a man on the moon.

The Cold War impacted all aspects of life in the United States in the 1960’s. People feared nuclear war, kids practiced bomb drills at school, Americans feared the spread of communism, and so much more. These fears continued for decades and permeated every aspect of American life. Huge sums of money were being spent on the defense budget in order to be prepared if the Cold War should escalate. However, if the Cold War had come to an early end, as Kennedy spoke of, the defense budget would have decreased and that money could have been used in so many different ways to help better the country. Additionally, the end of the Cold War

might have meant that the US would have pulled out of the Vietnam War. This would have saved the lives of many people and forever altered the course of the United States.

Even today, the world continues to see the consequences of Kennedy's death on space exploration. The American people fought to land a man on the moon, in part, to cement Kennedy's legacy into the legacy of the United States as a whole. During his lifetime, he was an avid proponent of the space race and space exploration, so when he died, as a way to continue what he had been working toward, people pushed to land a man on the moon. Today, space exploration is still a large part of what makes the United States what it is. NASA continues to make advancements such as landing rovers on Mars or learning more about our solar system and universe. Landing a man on the moon opened Pandora's box and ever since the United States has prioritized learning more about the universe. Without the assassination of Kennedy, this may not be the case today. Kennedy instilled a desire to do the impossible, to stare at a challenge in the face and conquer it through the combined efforts of the people of a nation. After he died, people wanted to see this mission through and conquer this challenge because the man who had previously fought for this effort had his life cut short. Once the US landed a man on the moon, it became an integral part of our identity, all due to the fact that President John F. Kennedy was killed before he could see this mission through. Had he lived perhaps we would have seen a joint mission between the USSR and the United States with two men landing together on the moon.

Overall, Kennedy had a lasting impact on society and politics of the time and that impact continues to affect our lives today. John F. Kennedy is one of the most recognizable presidents in all of US history and that is due to the impact of his actions during his lifetime and the impact of his assassination. Furthermore, both his lifetime and his assassination had a monumental impact

on the space race and continues to have a large impact on the way that we view space exploration today. If John F. Kennedy had not been assassinated, the immediate impact might have been an early end to the Cold War and a partnership with the Soviet Union to send the first man to space. Today, if Kennedy's assassination had not occurred, space exploration might not be as integral a part of the United States as a country. President John F. Kennedy's assassination was a pivotal moment in our country's history that greatly affected that time period and continues to have lasting effects today.

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