

MOON LANDING HOAX

On September 12, 1962, U.S. president John F. Kennedy delivered this famous statement at Rice University: "We choose to go to the moon. 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" (Kennedy 1962). On July 20, 1969, just seven years later, Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin became the first humans to walk on the surface of the moon. Perhaps one of the world's most enduring conspiracy theories claims that the Apollo missions to the moon were a hoax. The moon landing is iconic. It played a significant role in defining America's identity during the Cold War. During the ideological struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union, each nation employed nearly any method imaginable to gain the upper hand, including the use of espionage and propaganda. The symbols of the 45-year-long Cold War speak to a time of paranoia, fear, and the need to appear victorious. For the United States, the very fate of capitalism—a way of life, it was said—was under threat from the creeping clutches of communism. One of the ways in which the United States planned to assert Western dominance was by winning the space race.

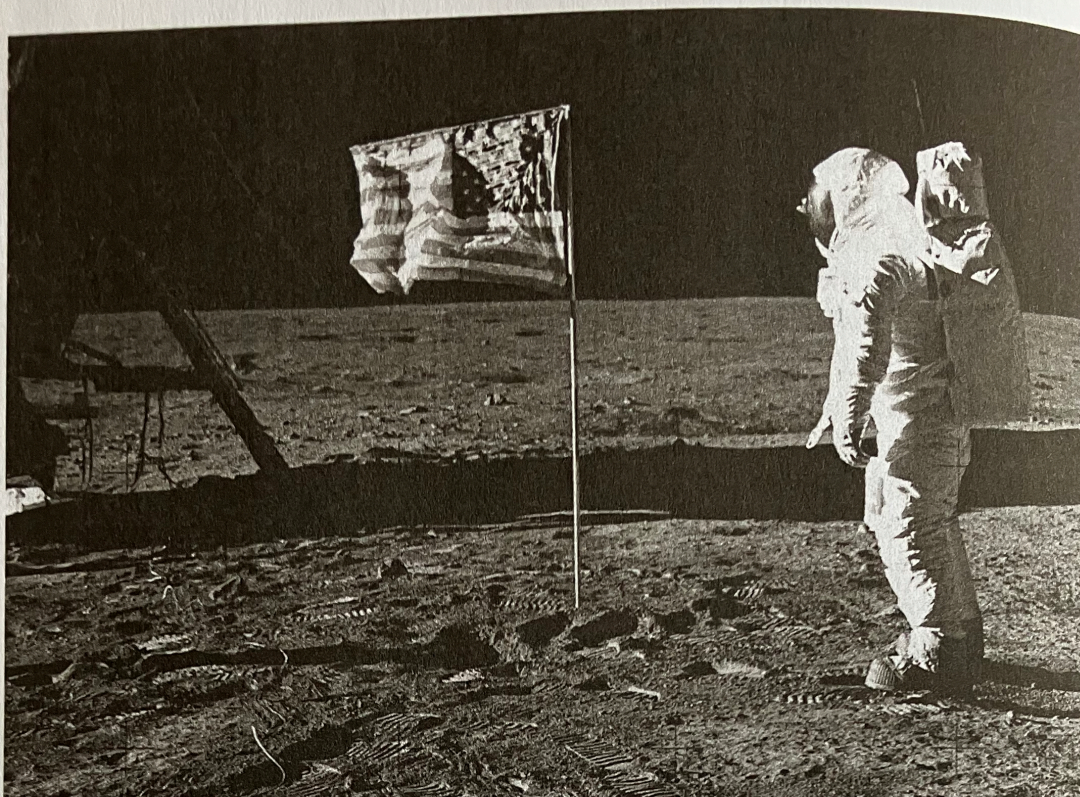
Initially, the United States fell far behind in this rivalry. In 1957, the Soviet Union launched *Sputnik*, the world's first artificial satellite. *Sputnik* circled the globe, transmitting radio signals back to Earth. The launch embarrassed the United States, as it clearly showed that the Soviet Union's technological capabilities had already surpassed the West's. To make matters worse, the Soviet Union claimed another early victory: it successfully launched the first manned vehicle into space. In 1961, Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin (1934–1968) became the first human to journey into space and orbit the Earth. As a result of falling behind in the space race, the United States was quickly losing face. By the early 1960s, already well into the Cold War, the United States desperately needed a public victory to boost morale. In order to represent the supremacy of Western democracy over Soviet communism, America needed to outdo the Soviet Union in the areas of science and technology.

Kennedy provided leadership on this issue by declaring that the United States would be the first nation to land a man on the moon. Thus began the intensive Apollo program to develop the technology necessary for such a monumental feat.

Buzz Aldrin's Punch

Bart Sibrel is a Nashville taxicab driver and a noted moon landing hoax conspiracy theorist who has produced several documentaries on the subject. He is most widely known, however, for confronting Buzz Aldrin in 2002 and demanding that he swear to the authenticity of the moon landings. After Sibrel called him "a liar, a thief, and a coward," Aldrin punched the conspiracy theorist in the face. Video of the incident made international headlines, and while no charges were filed against Aldrin, Sibrel wrote a letter of apology to the astronaut.

Matthew Hayes



Astronaut Buzz Aldrin stands beside a U.S. flag on the moon on July 20, 1969, during the Apollo 11 mission. Some conspiracy theorists have long insisted that the Apollo missions were faked and that the moon landings were elaborate hoaxes filmed on Earth using special effects. (National Aeronautics and Space Administration)

Seven years later, at the peak of the space race, the United States finally beat the Soviet space program by landing men on the moon. It was a historic moment that still resonates today, and it solidified the U.S. position in the Cold War's global hierarchy. Estimates of the Apollo program's total costs are around \$24 billion (in 1970s dollars). The program directly employed 400,000 people, and an additional 20,000 industrial firms and universities supported the effort. Footage of the first steps taken on the moon's surface was broadcast all around the world. Many iconic images followed, and the moon landing has since taken on mythological proportions in the American consciousness.

In the years since, many have claimed that the moon landing was actually an elaborate hoax designed to claim victory in the space race without actually winning it. Conspiracy theorists claim that the United States was so desperate to best the Soviet Union that while the nation was legitimately working on the Apollo program, it also began a parallel effort to develop a Plan B; that is, a contingency plan to fake the moon landing so that the world would think the United States had accomplished the task President Kennedy envisioned. The West could ill afford another failure, especially one of this scale, so—according to these theories—the United States had to take drastic measures.

These claims purport to draw upon a substantial body of evidence. One of the most commonly cited pieces of evidence is the large number of photographs that

astronauts took on the moon. Analysis of these photos has allegedly revealed a number of oddities and discrepancies. First, conspiracy theorists note the blackness of space beyond the surface, entirely devoid of stars that they claim would be otherwise visible. They also see in the photographs certain "hot spots" on the surface that illuminate the astronauts or spaces around them, as well as various reflections and lens flares in the photos, as if produced by film spotlights. Furthermore, they note the inconsistency of shadows on the surface, which do not all appear parallel to one another, again supposedly indicating the existence of multiple sources of light. Claims also center on the fact that no Earth telescopes have subsequently produced clear images of the objects left on the moon. Theorists also observe backgrounds of the lunar surface that appear identical in photos taken at different locations. Finally, they are suspicious of the very quality and high volume of photos taken, a difficult task given the limitations of the astronauts' suits and the difficulty of operating the cameras.

Others point to inconsistencies in the surface environment, including the American flag that was planted on the surface, which appears to flap as if in a wind, and the lack of an identifiable crater beneath the landing module, which should have kicked up enough dust to leave an impression. Similarly, they point to how clear the astronauts' boot prints appear, which allegedly should not be possible given how dry the surface is, not to mention the fact that the astronauts had to pass through the Van Allen radiation belts, which should have lethally dosed them. Conspiracy theorists also point to the temperature on the moon, which should have been high enough to melt the camera film. They also point out certain mechanical issues, such as a disbelief that the cooling systems in the astronauts' suits would have functioned in a vacuum, as well as inconsistencies in communications delays from the moon to Earth. Others simply point to what they consider the innate unbelievability of the whole venture by claiming that the United States could not possibly have advanced technologically so far so quickly, given the state of its space program at the beginning of the 1960s. For some, evidence of a hoax and cover-up is found by tracing the deaths of personnel, both astronauts and civilians, involved in the program.

The Apollo 1 mission, for instance, failed completely. During a launch test of the module in 1967, a cabin fire led to the death of the three onboard astronauts as well as the destruction of the module itself. The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) determined that an electrical problem caused the fire; however, many conspiracy theorists believe the incident was intentional. The three crewmembers, so the theory goes, knew that the module would never make it to the moon, and so they were assassinated before they could reveal the truth. A string of other deaths plagued the program, which has provided fertile ground for the conspiracy-minded imagination. A number of documentaries, Web sites, and books have capitalized on interest in the alleged hoax, most recently the 2016 thriller *Operation Avalanche*, which depicts a plucky team of CIA agents creating the faked footage for NASA.

In addition to the evidence that conspiracy theorists have compiled to demonstrate the hoax, they have also suggested the means by which they believe the

government perpetrated the hoax. According to their accounts, the government filmed the footage in a studio. The government constructed a replica landing module, fabricated moon dust and rocks, and even trained actors to use the astronauts' suits. Conspiracists claim that NASA used the most advanced photographic technology to simulate the grainy texture of footage that would have been beamed to Earth from hundreds of thousands of miles away. According to the conspiracy, the government created the footage of the astronauts bouncing around on the lunar surface by using a combination of slow motion and actors on wires. The real landing module did in fact lift off from Earth and journey to the moon, but it never actually made the landing. Instead, it simply orbited the moon for the requisite time the mission was supposed to take, while NASA and the U.S. government carefully broadcast studio footage around the world to match the mission timing. Conspiracists claim NASA also faked the radio communications sent from the moon and timed the communications to simulate the correct time delay. Conspiracists claim that all of this becomes obvious when one studies the photographs from the surface, as well as the quality and timing of the footage and radio transmissions. NASA has refuted these claims, and third-party organizations have provided evidence that the moon landings did in fact take place.

One version of the conspiracy deserves special mention. In 1968, the American filmmaker Stanley Kubrick (1928–1999) released his sci-fi masterpiece *2001: A Space Odyssey*. The film used never-before-seen visual effects to mimic the conditions that astronauts experienced in spaceflight, such as zero gravity. The film's realistic portrayal struck audiences, and it is now considered one of the most influential films of all time. Conspiracy theorists suggest that officials at NASA saw the film and, realizing that the Apollo missions would never be successful, decided to ask Kubrick to help them fake the moon landing. Some claim that the American government coerced Kubrick to do so by threatening to expose his brother as a communist—a serious threat given the Cold War hysteria at the time. This claim is hardly credible, though, given the fact that Kubrick did not have a brother. Additionally, to shoot his 1975 film *Barry Lyndon*, Kubrick used a specific Zeiss camera lens that was custom made for the Apollo missions. Conspiracy theorists claim that Kubrick was given the lens as part of the arrangement to fake the moon landing.

Others claim that yet another Kubrick film, his 1980 *The Shining*, is a very subtle and veiled confession of his involvement with the hoax. There are allegedly clues hidden within the film that allude to the conspiracy. For example, the Overlook Hotel serves as a metaphor for America, and the blanket of winter snow that covers it represent the Soviet Union's creeping influence. A number of symbols in the film seem to depict rockets about to launch, including an actual picture of the Apollo 11 rocket on a boy's sweater. Moreover, the room in the Overlook Hotel that causes such conflict in the film is Room 237, a number that if extrapolated roughly matches the distance between the Earth and the moon (Weidner 2009). This analysis is featured in Rodney Ascher's 2012 documentary *Room 237*, which uses footage from Kubrick's many films to depict various and differing interpretations of *The Shining*. Kubrick's involvement in the hoax is also the subject of the

2015 comedy *Moonwalkers*. Stanley Kubrick died in 1999, and since theories of his involvement with the alleged hoax flared up after his death, his daughter Vivian Kubrick turned to the media to refute publicly claims that her father was involved with an alleged hoax. In 2015, Buzz Aldrin was prompted to go on record as well when the 49th anniversary of the landing resurfaced conspiracy claims; he retweeted a post calling anyone who believes in the hoax theory a “colossal nob end” who “should get a new brain” (Malkin 2015).

Matthew Hayes

See also: Apollo Space Program; *Challenger* Shuttle Disaster; Exopolitics and Missions to Mars

Further Reading

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MOONIES

The Unification Church, or the Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity, commonly known as the “Moonies,” is a new religious movement within Christianity founded by Sun Myung Moon (1920–2012) in Seoul, South Korea, on May 1, 1954. The group rapidly expanded, and the movement’s first missionary was dispatched to the United States in 1959. As religion scholar Mary Farrell Bednarowski notes, at first glance the movement’s “interpretations of marriage and sexuality and its conservative politics . . . appear to coincide with the