

Eisenhower's Sputnik Moment: The Race for Space and International Prestige.

By Yanek Mieczkowski. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013.
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When I first heard of this book, I wondered what the author had to offer that was new on such a well-worn topic. After reading it, I am still wondering. Almost thirty years ago, Walter McDougall's Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Heavens and the Earth: A Political History of the Space Age* (1985) covered the same ground, albeit in a larger framework than offered by Mieczkowski. Twenty years ago, Robert Divine published *The Sputnik Challenge: Eisenhower's Response to the Soviet Satellite* (1993), although he examined the period only from *Sputnik 1*'s launch in October 1957 up to the end of 1958. (Mieczkowski covers the president's two terms and beyond.) There are also a number of articles on Eisenhower's space policy, notably by David Callahan and Fred Greenstein in *Spaceflight and the Myth of Presidential Leadership*, edited by Roger Launius and Howard McCurdy (1997).

Mieczkowski does write well and skillfully deploys the short quotations he found in archival sources, newspapers, and secondary works. He also provides more sustained attention to Eisenhower's understanding of national prestige and how it impacted the space race than is offered elsewhere. Yet, none of Mieczkowski's interpretations are novel. Mostly very positive about Eisenhower's legacy and actions as president, the author follows Greenstein's influential interpretation of a "hidden-hand presidency": Eisenhower was much more involved and competent than he appeared to be, but he liked to play his cards very close to the chest. Like McDougall, Divine, and others, Mieczkowski nonetheless criticizes the president's underestimation of *Sputnik*'s impact on the United States's international reputation and his fumbling of the initial public-relations crisis. The author also argues that the general public's reaction was much calmer than that of the media and political elites in the fall of 1957, which is in line with recent scholarship undercutting the myth of widespread hysteria. But he cites only secondary sources and brings no new research to that topic.

Moreover, Mieczkowski lacks command of the vocabulary and history of space technology. Chapter 2 in particular, which flashes back to the pre-*Sputnik* origins of the Eisenhower space program, has numerous errors. The German V-2 did not have "powerful boosters" (p. 37)—it had one integral rocket engine. German scientists were not preparing "trans-Atlantic rockets" at the time of their capture at the end of the war, and Wernher von Braun surrendered hundreds of miles from "a forest near Peenemünde" (p. 38)—then about to be overrun by the Soviets. The *Viking* sounding rocket was not the first stage of the *Vanguard* satellite launcher (p. 45), and the Naval Research Laboratory will be surprised to hear that *Vanguard* was

“without a specific government agency guiding the project” (p. 48). Mieczkowski accepts assertions that that program was basically civilian, even though all the elements of it, except for the scientific cover provided by the National Academy of Sciences, came from the Defense Department. His explanation of why the Stewart Committee chose *Vanguard* over von Braun’s army orbiter project is erratic and much too captive to the interpretation that the decision was made because of *Vanguard*’s allegedly civilian appearance. It is clear that Mieczkowski has not carefully read some of the works cited in his bibliography. Later in the book, terminology gets the better of him as he uses “satellite” when he means “booster,” misspells the names of secondary actors, and makes several more factual mistakes. It would be tedious to list them all here.

Mieczkowski’s errors are not so critical that the book is not worth reading. Nonspecialists will find value in his elaboration of how Eisenhower dealt with the space race and international prestige in the context of wider administration policy and actions. But space-history specialists will find little new in *Eisenhower’s Sputnik Moment* other than attention to that aspect of the broader context of the space race.

MICHAEL J. NEUFELD

Michael J. Neufeld is a curator at the National Air and Space Museum, Smithsonian Institution, and is the author of *The Rocket and the Reich* (1995) and *Von Braun* (2007). Recently, he edited *Spacefarers: Images of Astronauts and Cosmonauts in the Heroic Age of Spaceflight* (2013).

Science on American Television: A History.

By Marcel Chotkowski LaFollette. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013. Pp. x+306. \$45.

A number of books have been written about the depictions of scientists and engineers in cinema, but few book-length analyses on televised science exist. Marcel Chotkowski LaFollette’s *Science on American Television: A History* fills this gap. Those who work with scientists and engineers know that they are generally displeased about the state of science education in the United States, but they are particularly aggrieved by the inaccuracies and inanities of televised science. Those who work with journalists and television producers know that they struggle to find scientists who are also good TV personalities and who know how to tell a good story. Both groups are happy to point the finger at the other for the paucity of quality science programming on TV. LaFollette’s book provides a historical view of this conflict, beginning with the rise of television during the postwar era and extending to the 1990s. *Science on American Television* convincingly argues that the cultural beliefs of both television producers and scientists led to programming that “continually undermined the process of creating the