

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

MEN INTO SPACE: THE SPACE RACE AND ENTERTAINMENT TELEVISION

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The origins of the Cold War space race were not only political and technological, but also cultural.¹ On American television, the drama, *Men into Space* (CBS, 1959-60), illustrated one way that entertainment television shaped the United States' entry into the Cold War space race in the 1950s. By examining the program's relationship to previous space operas and spaceflight advocacy, a close reading of the 38 episodes reveals how gender roles, the dangers of spaceflight, and the realities of the Moon as a place were depicted. By doing so, this article seeks to build upon and develop the recent scholarly investigations into cultural aspects of the Cold War.

The space age began with the launch of the first artificial satellite, *Sputnik*, by the Soviet Union on October 4, 1957. But the space race that followed was not a foregone conclusion. When examining the United States, scholars have examined all of the factors that led to the space technology competition that emerged.² Notably, Howard McCurdy has argued in *Space and the American Imagination* (1997) that proponents of human spaceflight

¹ Notably, Asif A. Siddiqi, *The Rocket's Red Glare: Spaceflight and the Soviet Imagination, 1857-1957*, Cambridge Centennial of Flight (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) offers the first history of the social and cultural contexts of Soviet science and the military rocket program. Alexander C. T. Geppert, ed., *Imagining Outer Space: European Astroculture in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) resulted from a conference examining the intersections of the social, cultural, and political histories of spaceflight in the Western European context.

² See in particular, the Pulitzer-Prize-winning book, Walter McDougall, *...the Heavens and the Earth: A Political History of the Space Age* (New York: Basic Books, 1985).

in the 1950s—a group that McCurdy dubbed “space boosters”—self-consciously used popular depictions of human spaceflight in the early- and mid-1950s to make space missions seem not only realistic but also fundable.³ Analyzing *Men into Space*, a space drama from the post-*Sputnik* era, demonstrates that entertainment television continued to influence the development of space exploration even after *Sputnik*’s launch. Moreover, *Men into Space* illustrates how advocacy for a particular vision of U.S. space travel—a peaceful military-run human spaceflight program—persisted even as other systems were already being put into place. Without attempting to extrapolate about the show’s reception, this article examines *Men into Space* as a depiction of and characterization of those speculative ideas about human spaceflight at the dawn of the space age.

This analysis of space-themed entertainment television represents an early part of a broader book project that examines American fascination with spaceflight as projections and reflections of changing ideas about American identity.⁴ That cultural history attempts to examine how and why spaceflight, both real and imagined, resonated as a theme in the United States in different ways in different times in the 20th Century. The Cold War represents a significant historical context for that work. When presenting this particular piece at the conference about “The Cold War and Entertainment Television” at the Université de Paris 8, however, significant disparities in the treatment of the Cold War became apparent. Some of the popular culture scholars presenting at the meeting conceived the Cold War as an historical period, others as a theme.

For this analysis, however, the Cold War functions as an historical event: a geopolitical, economic, social, and cultural conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union that was played out at home and abroad for both combatant nations as well as in Europe, Asia, and Latin America. In that context, the space race served as a proxy battlefield. Just as the conflicts in Korea and Vietnam in the 1950s and 1960s can be understood as battlefields of the Cold War, on which the United States and the Soviet Union engaged through proxies to carry out their ongoing conflict without

³ Howard E. McCurdy, *Space and the American Imagination* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997).

⁴ Another look at *Men into Space*, examining the program’s representations of images of possible space travelers, in comparison with another Ziv Television show, *The Man and the Challenge* (NBC, 1959-60), is Margaret A. Weitekamp, “Setting the Scene for Human Spaceflights: *Men into Space* and *The Man and the Challenge*,” Michael J. Neufeld, ed., *Spacefarers: Images of Astronauts and Cosmonauts in the Heroic Era of Spaceflight*, A Smithsonian Contribution to Knowledge (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Scholarly Press, 2013), 9-33.

triggering the full threat of a “hot” shooting war that would likely include the real possibility of nuclear annihilation, so too did the space race become a battlefield of the Cold War. Participants and observers, both then and now, understood it to be so.⁵ Moreover, in the face of the specter of mutual assured destruction, the space race allowed weapons originally developed to deliver conventional and nuclear warheads to be used instead to launch satellites, probes, or even human space travelers, demonstrating each side’s technological capabilities without escalating into outright warfare. For that reason, the complex history of the origins of the space race continues to be a key part of Cold War history. Entertainment television helped shape how the space race played out in the United States.

Historical Contexts for *Men into Space*

Men into Space had three significant contexts: the space-themed children’s shows that preceded it, the popular culture advocacy by experts with ideas about real spaceflight, and the *Sputnik* moment that began the space age. As McCurdy first argued in *Space and the American Imagination*, in the 1950s a dedicated group of space boosters used popular culture, including magazines and television, to try to demonstrate that human space travel was possible and should be pursued. They hoped to change the image of spaceflight that had otherwise been dominated by science fiction since *Buck Rogers* and *Flash Gordon* first debuted as comic strips in 1929 and 1934, respectively. What really changed things, however, was not just the Soviet launch of *Sputnik*, but the series of space events that compounded the *Sputnik* surprise. *Men into Space* represented a reaction to these combined historical circumstances.

Created by the Midwest-based Ziv Television Programs, Inc., a highly-successful independent producer of syndicated programming,⁶ and

⁵ For instance, former NASA astronaut Senator John Glenn routinely begins his explanations of his history-making spaceflight as the first American to orbit the Earth by explaining its Cold War context. See, for instance, “An Evening with Two Mercury Astronauts,” Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum, Washington, D.C., June 23, 2011, John H. Glenn Lecture, archived online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iX-ayUINPMs&feature=youtu.be> (Accessed December 3, 2015).

⁶ For a lively history of Frederick Ziv and Ziv Television Productions, see Morleen Getz Rouse, “A History of the F. W. Ziv Radio and Television Syndication Companies: 1930–1960” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1976). The Ziv Television Productions archives are part of the United Artists collection held at the

sponsored on CBS by Lucky Strike cigarettes, *Men into Space* depicted the adventures of Colonel Ed McCauley (portrayed by actor Bill Lundigan) as the lead astronaut in an American space program run by the military.⁷ Working from a formula that had proven to be successful for Ziv, which specialized in 30-minute male-oriented action adventure dramas, including Westerns as well as crime or courtroom dramas, *Men into Space* aimed to satisfy an adult audience with authentic plots that had been approved by authoritative sources. In this case, the show boasted the cooperation of the U.S. Department of Defense, which reviewed the scripts, consulted on the sets, and even provided real spacesuits for the first episode. Other significant consultants included Chesley Bonestell, a well-known space artist, who guided set design. Originally titled “Moon Probe,” the show depicted a military space program conducting missions that featured different characters each week, paired with McCauley as the one consistent character.

Men into Space had a serious and earnest tone intended to distinguish it from most space-themed entertainment television that preceded it, which would best be called space operas. In TV’s early years, when most television sound stages captured the action with one stationary camera and special effects had to be done live in real time, the child-focused space programs that dominated the airwaves were low-budget melodramas.⁸ Programs such as *Captain Video and His Video Rangers* (DuMont, 1949-55) and *Space Patrol* (ABC, 1950-1955) broadcast live performances, which inherently limited the quality what could be done, especially given the demanding broadcast schedules. *Tom Corbett, Space Cadet* (CBS, ABC, NBC, DuMont, NBC, 1950-55) bounced around from network to network but offered a more realistic portrayal of space flight, owing to the recommendations made by advisor Willy Ley. Networks and production companies soon started making imitators to cash in on the success of the

Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research, at the Wisconsin Historical Society Archives in Madison, Wisconsin.

⁷ For a detailed episode guide, see John C. Fredriksen, *Men Into Space* (Albany, GA: BearManor Media, 2013). Also, Gary Coville and Patrick Lucanio, “Reaching for the Sky!: When the Soviet Union Launched Sputnik 1 in 1957, What Once Had Been Only Science Fiction Quickly Became Science Fact in a World Eager to Grasp the Elusive Edge of Space,” *Filmfax* 21 (July 1990): 54-66.

⁸ The best overall guide to this television genre remains Patrick Lucanio and Gary Coville, eds., *American Science Fiction Television Series of the 1950s* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1998). This discussion of space-themed entertainment television focuses on programs that are primarily about space travel, excluding science fiction anthology shows such as *Tales of Tomorrow* (1951-1953), or *The Twilight Zone* (1959-1964), which did have some space-themed episodes.

space trend. *Buck Rogers* (ABC, 1950-1951) and *Flash Gordon* (syndicated, 1954-1955) experienced revivals that spawned new extensions of franchises that had been in their heyday in the 1930s. Likewise, CBS broadcast *Rod Brown of the Rocket Rangers* (1953-54) to try to catch up with the success on other networks. Overall, however, space-themed entertainment television in the 1950s demonstrated how young a medium television was.

Uninterested in getting the science right, most space operas were relatively cheaply done and aimed at children. And yet, they had real effect on the perceptions of space exploration. The association of spaceflight and fantasy became a shorthand way to dismiss interest in real space science. For instance, Eisenhower's Secretary of Defense "Engine Charlie" Wilson once called the Surgeons General of the military services to a meeting in his office when he learned that military doctors were conducting research into possible space travel. Wilson ordered his subordinates to stop such programs, denigrating their efforts by calling them, derisively, "this Buck Rogers nonsense."⁹ Wilson worried about the reputation of the military services and, in an era of constrained budgets, about anything that would seem like frivolous spending. In the historical moment before *Sputnik's* launch made military space projects viable, all such research risked seeming fantastical, like the childish dramas on television. Ironically, entertainment television later became an effective way for spaceflight supporters to offer a counternarrative.

The advocacy campaign conducted by Wernher von Braun and the other space boosters arose when experts who wanted funding for real space programs met entertainment editors and producers who were looking for the next big thing to excite their audiences. Inspired by a series of symposia about space travel hosted by the Hayden Planetarium in New York City in 1951, editors for the weekly *Collier's* magazine organized some of the participants to contribute a series of articles, which ran during 1952-4.¹⁰ Edited by Cornelius Ryan of *Collier's*, the articles carried by-lines from German engineer Wernher von Braun, acclaimed writer Willy Ley, astronomer Fred Whipple, physicists Heinz Haber and Joseph Kaplan, and were beautifully illustrated by artists Chesley Bonestell, Fred Freeman, and

⁹ A. H. Schwichtenburg, oral history interview conducted by Jake Spidle, February 20, 1985, New Mexico History of Medicine Project, Medical Center Library, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, New Mexico, 4.

¹⁰ McCurdy, 35, 37-40. Mike Neufeld examines von Braun's actions and motivations in these events in great detail in chapter 11 of Michael J. Neufeld, *Von Braun: Dreamer of Space, Engineer of War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Publisher, 2007), 255-61, 268-73, 275-77.

Rolf Klep.¹¹ To promote the pieces, *Collier's* sent von Braun on speaking engagements, giving him additional ways to promote his ideas about orbiting space stations and regular human spaceflights. The popularity of the *Collier's* magazine pieces, in turn, led von Braun to become the face of spaceflight advocacy on Walt Disney's *Disneyland* TV series.

Disney animator Ward Kimball had been a fan of the *Collier's* series and suggested that similar stories could be used to promote "Tomorrowland" in Disneyland's eponymous television program on ABC. Three episodes aired between 1955 and 1957: "Man in Space" (1955), "Man and the Moon" (1955), and "Mars and Beyond" (1957).¹² Through the *Collier's* magazine series and the *Disneyland* television program, McCurdy's space boosters—a group that included von Braun, Ley, Haber, and Bonestell to name a few—worked deliberately to depict space travel as attainable. The plan that von Braun promoted later became known as the "von Braun paradigm": a blueprint for human space exploration that envisioned, in sequence, regular spaceflights, a Moon landing, a space station, and later, a Mars mission.¹³ As persuasive as the rhetoric and illustrations of the space boosters were, however, altering the funding environment for space efforts in the United States required the launch of not just one satellite, but the additional shocks of a second satellite and a launch failure.

Men into Space was developed in reaction to the sequence of events that began the space age. The first part of that sequence began when the Soviet Union launched *Sputnik* in 1957. More important, just one month later and before the United States had been able to respond with an American satellite launch, *Sputnik II*, a 508.3 kg (1120.61 lb) spacecraft, carried a rudimentary life support system and the dog Laika into space. (The second launch, requested by Khrushchev after hearing the acclaim for *Sputnik*, was timed

¹¹ "Man Will Conquer Space SOON," *Collier's Weekly*, March 22, 1952, 23-39; "Man on the Moon," *Collier's Weekly*, October 18, 1952, 52-61; "Man on the Moon: The Exploration," *Collier's Weekly*, October 25, 1952, 38-48; "World's First Space Suit," *Collier's Weekly*, February 28, 1953, 40-48; "More About Man's Survival in Space," *Collier's Weekly*, March 7, 1953, 56-63; "How Man Will Meet Emergency in Space Travel," *Collier's Weekly*, March 14, 1953, 38-44; "The Baby Space Station: First Step in the Conquest of Space," *Collier's Weekly*, June 27, 1953, 33-35, 38, 40; "Can We Get to Mars? Is There Life on Mars?" *Collier's Weekly*, April 30, 1954, 21-9.

¹² Neufeld, 285-90; J. P. Telotte, "Animating Space: Disney, Science, and Empowerment," *Science Fiction Studies* 35 (March 2008): 48-59.

¹³ An attempt to fulfil this plan guided NASA's goals for decades. The idea of the "von Braun paradigm" has been credited to Dwayne A. Day. Also cited in Neufeld, *Von Braun*, 277.

to mark the 40th anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution.) Then, the U.S. Naval Research Laboratory's Vanguard/TV-3 failed publicly on December 6, 1957, when the launch vehicle rose just feet from the pad before exploding in a fireball, leaving the fallen satellite beeping on the ground. The space age had begun and the U.S. had not yet proved capable of participating. American space success finally came with the successful launch of *Explorer 1* on January 31, 1958.¹⁴ The idea for *Men into Space* emerged in that post-*Sputnik* moment, when a savvy television producer was looking for ways to feed audiences' excitement about the new realities of spaceflight.

A Military Human Spaceflight Program

Each episode of Ziv's *Men into Space* opened with a voice-over narration that highlighted its place in that transitional moment at the beginning of the real space age. Just before a short teaser of scenes from that week's episode, the announcer intoned some variation on the opening lines, "The story you are about to see hasn't happened—yet. These are scenes from that story, a story that will happen soon," ("Moonquake," airdate November 11, 1959). The rest of the introduction explained that the premise depicted in that particular episode would happen when men launched in rockets, or landed on the Moon, or built a space station, or whatever the setting of the week was. Once the show's premise was better established, in later episodes, the opening turned more directly to the matter at hand. Throughout the series, the basic plot of most episodes featured a space mission being conducted by multiple astronauts and monitored from the ground by a military launch base at which various officers would consult whenever a crisis loomed. Colonel Ed McCauley led a different crew into space each week, reinforcing the impression of a vibrant, active space program, requiring a large complement of astronauts to make regular flights into space.

It is a mark of how much entertainment television was still perceived as a useful medium for promoting particular visions of space travel that military officials agreed to advise *Men into Space* even after the space age

¹⁴ A partial list of the scholarly literature on the *Sputnik* moment and the early years of the space race includes Asif Siddiqi, *Challenge to Apollo: The Soviet Union and the Space Race, 1945-1974* (Washington, DC: National Aeronautics and Space Administration, NASA History Division, Office of Policy and Plans, 2000); Robert A. Divine, *The Sputnik Challenge: Eisenhower's Response to the Soviet Satellite* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); and Walter McDougall, *...the Heavens and the Earth*. See also Neufeld, *Von Braun*, chapter 13.

had already begun. With the launch of *Sputnik*, the Pentagon's initial reluctance to fund real space initiatives largely dissipated. In that more conducive environment, multiple American military services competed to take the lead in space travel. On several counts, including the privately-funded examinations of whether women could withstand the physical rigors of spaceflight, the final form that space efforts would take was in question in the first years of the space race.¹⁵ In fact, three of the U.S. military services created their own separate human spaceflight programs: "Man in Space Soonest" for the Air Force, "Project Adam" for the Army, and "Manned Earth Reconnaissance" for the Navy.¹⁶ Even after the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) was founded in October 1958 as a civilian agency to conduct and publicize American civilian spaceflight efforts, each of these military services still continued their own separate programs.

Endorsing *Men into Space* promoted a vision of a peaceful military-run space program—and allowed the U.S. Air Force to advertise its hoped-for role in this new field. *Men into Space* included end credits acknowledging support from several segments of the U.S. Air Force, including the Air Research and Development Command, the School of Aviation Medicine, and the Office of the Surgeon General. For its part, the U.S. Navy provided the pressure suits used as space suits in the first episode, a contribution that was also noted in the end credits. (The program's producers created costume spacesuits with Air Force logos on the helmets for the rest of the season.¹⁷) Stock footage of U.S. Air Force planes and facilities filled out various plots (for instance "Burnout," airdate December 9, 1959). In "Earthbound" (airdate January 27, 1960), McCauley advises an overeager young engineer played by Robert Reed (who later portrayed Mike Brady in *The Brady Bunch*), "I should think the quickest way to get into space would be to join the United States Air Force." The Department of Defense review of *Men into Space* lent credibility to the idea of having human spaceflight organized by the military, even as the real focus of human spaceflight shifted to the civilian NASA organization.

¹⁵ For a history of the Lovelace woman astronaut testing project, see Margaret A. Weitekamp, *Right Stuff, Wrong Sex: America's First Woman in Space Program* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).

¹⁶ Loyd S. Swenson Jr., James M. Grimwood, and Charles C. Alexander, *This New Ocean: A History of Project Mercury*, NASA Special Publication 4201 (Washington, DC: National Aeronautics and Space Administration, 1989), available on-line at: <http://history.nasa.gov/SP-4201/ch4-7.htm>. Accessed December 3, 2014.

¹⁷ Weitekamp, in Neufeld, ed., *Spacefarers*, 9-33.

The fictionalized U.S. space program depicted in *Men into Space* promoted American ideals by contrasting the U.S. program with perceptions about the Soviet Union's efforts. That is, the U.S. space program depicted in *Men into Space* represented what the Soviet program was thought **not** to be: the American program was open and publicly visible (not secret) as well as scientific, exploratory, and sustained (not chasing technological stunts). The very first episode centered on introducing the crew and mission of the XMP-13 (eXperimental Moon Probe) to the assembled press corps before running the first Moon landing with the newsmen in attendance on the ground for the full time ("Moon Probe," airdate September 30, 1959). Moreover, the marriage of science with military service throughout the show became the tag line used to attract readers to a tie-in comic book produced by Dell in 1960. Above the title, on the top edge of the cover (which would be visible to prospective readers sorting through racks of such books in a store) the comic book carried the call-out: "Scientist-soldiers explore tomorrow's frontiers."¹⁸

Because the program used military oversight as a way to buttress its authenticity, the problems encountered by the heroic fictional astronauts had to be based in what space scientists expected to encounter when real space flights began. Realistic problems included mechanical failures, unexpected illness or injury, or selfish theft by a crew member. Right from the beginning, *Men into Space* took pains to depict the fullest possible human consequences of spaceflight. In episode two, "Moon Landing," (airdate October 7, 1959), an astronaut dies from injuries sustained during the launch of the lunar rocket and, in keeping with his final request, is left on the Moon in a kind of space-aged "burial at sea." In "Asteroid" (airdate November 25, 1959), Dr. Stacy Croydon (Bill Williams) goes temporarily blind after lifting his space helmet sunshield at the wrong moment. The incident affects him so deeply that, even after his sight is restored, he transforms his hobby of breeding show dogs (seen at the beginning of the episode) into training Seeing Eye dogs. In "A Handful of Hours" (airdate January 20, 1960), another astronaut, Lieutenant Bob Kelly (Peter Baldwin) sacrifices himself to save his companions, leaving behind a son the same age as McCauley's child. Even as most of the episodes ended with mission success, *Men into Space* did try to portray how dangerous spaceflight could be. Respecting the scientific and technological realities of spaceflight as then understood meant ruling out some of the more dramatic possibilities found in other space operas, such as errant meteors. As a result, much of the action in *Men into*

¹⁸ Comic book, *Men into Space*, Dell TV Adventure, #1083, March-May 1960.

Space arose from personality conflicts, highlighting how the frontier of spaceflight would test men's mettle—and find some wanting.

The other projection of American identity in *Men into Space* became vested in the person of the explorer. *Men into Space's* U.S. astronauts were generally brave, stable, rational, white, hetero-, cis-, family men working in the military. In particular, Colonel Ed McCauley is depicted as a family man living in a single-family home and enjoying baseball, model building, and miniature race cars with his son. Masculine, a straight-shooter, honest, and brave, McCauley serves as a model of 1950s manhood. He acts as a father figure for the younger astronauts as well, advising his adult trainee astronauts on workplace dedication, attention to detail, and even how to treat a lady. In fact, Lucanio and Coville report that actor Bill Lundigan occasionally asked the *Men into Space* writers for script changes because he feared that his character was too earnest to be believable.¹⁹

In contrast, *Men into Space* suggests that women's roles in relation to the fictional space program would echo the rigid postwar gender roles idealized in depictions of suburban life in the 1950s and analyzed in Elaine Tyler May's pathbreaking *Homeward Bound* (1988). In the initial episodes of *Men into Space*, the only women depicted were in background roles as worried-but-supportive wives or fiancées of the space travelers. The first episode to respond to contemporary questions of whether women could participate in real space flights was "First Woman on the Moon" (airdate December 16, 1959). In that plotline, when one of the astronaut's wives is asked to accompany her husband into space, she asks what she would do during the mission. McCauley answers, "Same thing you would do down here: housekeep, cook, take care of Joe." When she protests, "I don't know anything about science, or space travel, or astrophysics, or anything," McCauley answers, "We know that. In fact, that's our idea. We want to take an average housewife who hasn't had any scientific training and see how she does."

The conflict and resolution in the episode reinforce the contemporary stereotypes about white, married women. The selected female astronaut candidate, Mrs. Renza Hale (Nancy Gates) complains that she cannot take more luggage or makeup with her and bursts into tears in disappointment when she sees the Spartan lunar base where she will be staying. In a later scene, she flees the dining room when her roast, her attempt at "atomic cooking," turns out to be too tough to carve. Frustrated with her circumstances, she leaves the lunar base to explore as the narrator opines that her exploration of the Moon was "purely feminine, not at all scientific."

¹⁹ Lucanio and Coville, *American Science Fiction*, 150.

In the end, after her husband apologizes for being short with her, she changes her attitude. In a dramatic turnaround that confirms the stereotypical ideal of the perfect homemaker, she conspires with McCauley, who smuggles supplies onto the lunar base for her, allowing her to produce a sumptuous meal, complete with an elaborately-frosted birthday cake. She reveals her triumph while wearing a flowing dress and high heels. The opportunity to fly in space had to be reshaped so that Mrs. Hale can exercise her femininity properly, in keeping with the ideals of 1950s housekeeping, before she—and the rest of the male crew—could be comfortable with her presence there.²⁰

Destination Moon

The adventures encountered by Col. McCauley and his various crew members reflected and reinforced not only contemporary social mores but also the von Braun paradigm for space travel as articulated in popular culture in the early 1950s. As articulated in the *Collier's* magazine series and later writing, Werner von Braun's speculative plans for spaceflight progress included several steps that would likely happen in sequence: regular human spaceflights to space, human landings on the Moon, a space station in orbit, and finally, human trips to Mars. *Men into Space* depicted the realization of that sequence. The very first episode ("Moon Probe") featured a human crew making the first test flights in an experimental lunar rocket. From there, the show's progression through the various steps of von Braun's ideal space program proceeded at a very fast pace. By the second episode ("Moon Landing"), McCauley and his men landed on Moon; in the third episode ("Building a Space Station," airdate October 21, 1959), McCauley led a team assembling a space station in orbit. By the fourth episode ("Water Tank Rescue," airdate October 28, 1959), McCauley's multi-person trip to the Moon to set up a permanent base suggested that such missions were on the verge of becoming commonplace.

The rest of the television program suggested that an elaborate manmade infrastructure has been established in space in short order. In an episode in which McCauley's crew faced certain death after their ship's oxygen tanks have been damaged ("Edge of Eternity," airdate December 2, 1959), they received advice not from Earth, but from a team orbiting Earth aboard a space station—and they were saved because they figured out how to get

²⁰ Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988); see also Lynn Spigel, *Welcome to the Dreamhouse: Popular Media and Postwar Suburbs* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001).

enough oxygen out of their fuel tanks to reach that station. Likewise, in “Quarantine” (airdate December 30, 1959), McCauley refereed a conflict between two scientists who disliked each other, but who nonetheless both wanted to conduct their own research during multiple stays aboard the orbiting space station. And, in “Christmas on the Moon” (airdate December 23, 1959), the holiday-themed drama between a suddenly-sick colleague and an atheist astronaut who recovered his faith took place in one of several established bases on the lunar surface.

The writers for *Men into Space* drew these plots from the latest ideas being advanced in speculative non-fiction, such as Willy Ley’s *Conquest of Space* (1949), which was illustrated by the same artist doing the art design for *Men into Space*, Chesley Bonestell.²¹ (The 1955 film of the same name used Ley’s title and employed Bonestell to create matte paintings used in the film, but the plot diverged significantly from Ley’s text.) Bonestell’s influence on the *Men into Space* set design reinforced the von Braun paradigm by helping to solidify the idea of the Moon as a place that could be visited. Through his work illustrating the *Collier’s* magazine series and on George Pal’s Academy-Award-winning *Destination Moon* (1950), Bonestell became one of the best known space artists of his day.²² Initially trained as an architect, Bonestell became an artist and illustrator, turning his talents to creating matte paintings for Hollywood movies in the late 1930s and 1940s. Having been fascinated with astronomy from an early age, however, Bonestell also gravitated toward space science, befriending many of the leading practitioners of the day.

Bonestell regularly attended scientific meetings with astronomers and astrophysicists, absorbing their latest discoveries into his artistic work. In 1957, Bonestell painted a 40-foot-long lunar landscape that went on display on a curved wall at the Museum of Science, Boston. Envisioned with great scientific precision, the mural that Bonestell painted imagined the viewer standing in a specific location on a dramatic lunar landscape featuring jagged hills and sharp shadows.²³ When he appeared at the meeting of the Astronomical Society of the Pacific in Los Angeles in 1958, they projected

²¹ Chesley Bonestell and Willy Ley, *The Conquest of Space* (New York: Viking, 1949).

²² Wyn Wachhorst, “The Dream of Spaceflight: Nostalgia for a Bygone Era” *Massachusetts Review* 36 (Spring 1995): 7-26; Ron Miller, “The Archeology of Space Art” *Leonardo* 29 (2): 139-43.

²³ “Mural Shows a Moon Crater at Boston Museum,” *New York Times*, March 31, 1957, 54. Taken off exhibit in 1969, when the Apollo Program lunar landings revealed that Bonestell’s images were not scientifically accurate, the 40-foot-long mural is now in the collection of the Smithsonian’s National Air and Space Museum.

his lunar landscape on the dome at the Griffith Planetarium as a part of the program.²⁴ As much as Bonestell drew on the work of real space scientists, in turn space scientists also used Bonestell's visions of astronomical phenomena to illustrate their points. For instance, in 1961, Carl Sagan used a Bonestell painting illustrating the "dust bowl hypothesis" as his first figure when he published new findings about the planet Venus in *Science*.²⁵

With the sets of *Men into Space*, Bonestell offered a vision of spaceflight—and the lunar surface in particular—that was persuasive and grounded in real science. Throughout the show, whenever the episode was set on the Moon, the characters walked around on a three-dimensional version of Bonestell's famous lunar landscape mural. Episodes also referred to specific places on the Moon. For instance, in "Moon Cloud" (airdate February 17, 1960), McCauley receives a report that the Lick Observatory has seen a phenomenon at the Alphonsus Crater and they go to check it out. When those kinds of details were combined with the special effects that made flying astronauts look like they were floating for short periods of time, or that heavy items were being passed easily from person to person in a low-gravity environment, it made the Moon seem like a real place that could eventually be reached by human explorers.

The overall depiction of space travel in the program also made the Earth-Moon trip seem like a regular, everyday thing to do. For instance, in the episode titled, "Space Trap" (airdate November 18, 1959), a member of the space crew, Doctor Cooper (Peter Hansen), comments on how commonplace this particular space voyage has become, saying to his fellow crewmen, "You guys don't sound like astronauts—more like commuters. I'm getting to feel like one myself." Of course, since *Men into Space* remained a space adventure show, Cooper's rocket soon experienced a malfunction in the carbon dioxide cleaners and the unconscious crew had to be rescued by a special mission flown by Colonel McCauley.

Despite the producers' attempts to frame *Men into Space* as an adult program, the show was still an adventure program and its fans still included many children. In recognition of that fact, licensed toys and memorabilia were created for the show's fans, including a Milton Bradley board game from 1960. In 1960, in addition to reading a novelization penned by Murray Leinster, a fan of the show could also covet the Colonel Ed McCauley plastic play space helmet from IDEAL toys. With its U.S. Air Force emblem and McCauley's name above the visor, the play helmet was not only a fun toy, but it also embodied some of the key characteristics and contradictions

²⁴ William M. Sinton, Sturla Einarsson, and Vera Graves, "Activities of the Society," *Publications of the Astronomical Society of the Pacific* 70 (October 1958): 527.

²⁵ Carl Sagan, "The Planet Venus," *Science* 133 (3456, March 24, 1961): 851.

of the program: a show that attempted to present realistic spaceflight for adults, drawing on the latest military space programs, and yet had a significant youth audience. Indeed, in the United Kingdom, *Men into Space* was shown in an early Saturday evening time slot usually aimed at younger audience. (After its cancellation, *Men into Space* was later replaced in that timeslot by another show that did quite well: *Dr. Who*).

Conclusion

Men into Space only aired for one season because network incursions into the business of syndicated television drove Frederick Ziv to sell his television production business part-way through that season. With the networks pushing increasingly into the syndication market as the 1960s began, the space for independent syndicators disappeared. In its one season, however, the program used the endorsement of the Department of Defense and the U.S. Air Force to project a particular vision of what human spaceflight could be. By the time the age of human spaceflight got underway in the early 1960s, both realistic space shows and fantastical space operas had been replaced on television by family sitcoms with space themes.

Space-themed entertainment television divorced itself from realism in the 1960s. Programs such as *The Jetsons* (Hanna Barbera, 1962-63), *My Favorite Martian* (CBS, 1963-66), *Lost in Space* (CBS, 1965-68), and *I Dream of Jeannie* (NBC, 1965-70) defamiliarized and disrupted suburban family life by setting the action in outer space or adding an alien “Other” to the cast. Space also became a setting for creative story-telling. Although not a space-themed program per se, *Outer Limits* (ABC, 1963-65) did include some space content and shared some connections with *Star Trek* (1966-69), the iconic serial adventure show that acknowledged the scientific realities of space travel even as it focused its energy on storytelling about contemporary social and political issues.²⁶

There are two possible reasons why realistic spaceflight no longer found an outlet in entertainment TV once the space race matured in the 1960s. First, the prevalence of real spaceflights in the news likely drew attention to actual missions, including the seven Project Mercury solo missions flown between 1961 and 1963 as well as the 10 dual-astronaut Gemini Program flights made in just two years (1965 and 1966). Second, as the Cold War news became increasingly fraught after 1962 (with incidents including the

²⁶ See especially Part II: “White Flight,” in Lynn Spigel, *Welcome to the Dreamhouse: Popular Media and Postwar Suburbs* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2001).

Cuban Missile Crisis, President Kennedy's assassination, and the Gulf of Tonkin resolution), fictionalized visions of space travel may have seemed too similar to real Cold War battles for producers seeking to satisfy audiences looking for escapist relief.

In early 1961, when President John F. Kennedy was looking for a realistic spaceflight plan that could demonstrate strength vis-à-vis the Soviet Union, he polled Vice-President Lyndon B. Johnson and his science advisors for "dramatic" options that would play well on the international stage.²⁷ Kennedy announced his decision on May 25, 1961 before a joint session of Congress: the United States would "commit itself to the achieving the goal, before this decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to the earth."²⁸ The policy-makers and NASA officials who helped JFK make that historic decision were probably not thinking directly about *Men into Space*. Those making the policy decision that started the NASA lunar landing program had likely been influenced, however, at least in part by the space boosters' campaign, the von Braun paradigm, and Chesley Bonestell's persuasive vision of the Moon as a physically-reachable destination, all of which had been reflected in and reinforced by contemporary entertainment television.

²⁷ The exchange of memoranda that recorded the options being considered by Kennedy can be found in John M. Logsdon, ed., *Exploring the Unknown: Selected Documents in the History of the U.S. Civil Space Program*, The NASA History Series, NASA SP-4407 (Washington, DC: National Aeronautics and Space Administration, 1995), 423-8. For more on JFK and the space program, see John M. Logsdon, *John F. Kennedy and the Race to the Moon*, Palgrave Studies in the History of Science and Technology (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

²⁸ President John F. Kennedy, "Excerpt from the 'Special Message to the Congress on Urgent National Needs,' Section IX: Space," Delivered before a joint session of Congress, May 25, 1961, https://www.nasa.gov/vision/space/features/jfk_speech_text.html#.Vm3KBOJkOQA (posted May 24, 2004, accessed December 3, 2015).