

National History Day: Frontiers in History

Resources from the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum

Space Exploration

Archival Sources

[**Images of President Kennedy and James Webb in the Oval Office, January 30, 1961**](#)

These two photographs of President Kennedy and Webb were taken in the Oval Office on January 30, 1961.

[**NASA March 1961 Pocket Statistics Book – Box Score**](#)

This small booklet includes a “Box Score” of the number of satellites and space probes sent into orbit by the Soviets and the US, providing an excellent example of the rivalry between the US and USSR at the time Webb became administrator of NASA.

[**Presentation by the Administrator of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration \(Webb\) to President Kennedy dated March 21, 1961, prior to their March 22, 1961 meeting**](#)

For the full document, scroll to pages 85-90 in the folder.

This six-page memo discusses the state of the NASA Space program in early 1961 and future goals. For a transcript, visit the [Foreign Relations of the US website](#).

[**NSAM 144: Assignment of Highest National Priority to the APOLLO Manned Lunar Landing Program**](#)

In this April 11, 1962 National Security Action Memorandum, President Kennedy grants highest national priority status to the manned lunar landing program, as proposed by Webb in a [March 13, 1962 memo to NASA](#).

[**September 11, 1962 image of President Kennedy, Vice President Johnson and James Webb at Cape Canaveral in Florida**](#)

The President visited Cape Canaveral as part of a two-day inspection tour of NASA field installations.

[**October 29, 1962 letter from James Webb to President Kennedy**](#)

For the full document, scroll to pages 91-95 in the folder.

Following his September tours of NASA facilities, President Kennedy requested that Webb provide him with the feasibility and cost of landing an astronaut on the Moon by the end of 1967. In this five-page letter, Webb provides the requested budget information and notes that a Moon landing by late 1967 is possible.

[**Excerpt of Secretly Recorded meeting between James Webb, Jerome Wiesner and President Kennedy, November 21, 1962**](#)

In "The President's Secret Tapes" vault of *The President's Desk* online interactive, click on the "Space" tape.

At an off-the-record meeting held on November 21, 1962, President Kennedy stated clearly that his administration's priority was for the United States to land on the Moon before the Soviet Union. The participants heard in this excerpt are President Kennedy, Administrator Webb, and Special Assistant to the President Jerome Wiesner.

Letter from James Webb to President Kennedy, following up on November 21 Meeting

For the full document, scroll to pages 132-140 in the folder.

This nine-page letter was sent to President Kennedy by Webb and his colleagues as a follow-up to his November 21, 1962 meeting with Kennedy about the priority of the manned lunar landing program in the space program. During the meeting, President Kennedy had asked Webb to write him a letter summarizing and clarifying his arguments

Memo regarding September 18, 1963 meeting between James Webb and President Kennedy ([page one](#)) ([page two](#))

This two-page memo from McGeorge Bundy, Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, to Kennedy provides the president with the major points Webb thinks the president should know in preparation for the president's meeting with Webb that day. Included in the memo is a discussion about whether or not the US should cooperate with the Soviets in Space expeditions.

Secretly recorded September 18, 1963 Sound Recording of James Webb and President Kennedy discussing the Lunar Program

In this 55-minute sound recording of a meeting held on September 18, 1963, between President Kennedy and James Webb, the men discuss the space program and the lunar landing. President Kennedy voices concern that the space program has lost its glamour politically which in tandem with the Congressional push for budget cuts will make for a hard sell during the 1964 Presidential campaign. There is much commentary from Administrator Webb on the Congressional leadership, issues with congressional committees, and the budget needed for the success of the program. Administrator Webb and President Kennedy agree that emphasizing the military/national security aspect of the space program will help to bring the mission back into the forefront. Administrator Webb talks openly about President Kennedy's leadership on science and technology, the importance of the space program, and how it will affect the country's future. President Kennedy is attempting to find a way to make the "Space Race" return to political favor and public support, which he believes is now wavering.

NSAM 271: Cooperation with the Soviet Union in Outer Space Matters

For the full document, scroll to pages 3-4 in the folder.

In this November 12, 1963 Security Action Memorandum, the President tasks Webb with finding ways to cooperate with the USSR in Space.

December 19, 1963 letter from James Webb to President Johnson following up on NSAM 271

In this letter to President Johnson, written soon after Kennedy's assassination, Webb discusses the efforts he and his staff have made to fulfill Kennedy's November 12th request and mentions that no reply has been received from the Soviet Union.

James E. Webb's Career

The James E. Webb Papers, held by the Kennedy Library, cover the period during the Kennedy administration, 1961-1963, when he was administrator of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). Although these papers have not yet been digitized, the finding aid for the collection provides a good chronology of Webb's career. He served as NASA's administrator from February 14, 1961 to October 7, 1968. For additional information about him, visit this [NASA web page](#).

Kennedy Library Programs and Podcast

American Moonshot: JFK and the Great Space Race

The transcript from this April 4, 2019 *Kennedy Library Forum* with historians Frederick Logevall and Douglas Brinkley include discussions of James Webb and his role at NASA.

JFK and the Space Race Podcast

Historian Douglas Brinkley discusses the Kennedy administration's push for space exploration and says of Webb, "Beside John F. Kennedy, the other two important people on going to the Moon are Lyndon Johnson and James Webb. Webb is running NASA in its high watermark during the Kennedy years. And he is an amazing administrator. I don't know if I've ever-- and I've written a lot of books of presidential history-- have ever seen an administrator of any government agency as effective as Webb."

2019 Space Summit

View videos of conversations with astronauts including Apollo 11 Command Module Pilot Michael Collins, listen to scientists talk about the role of women in the space program, and so much more. In celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Moon landing and President Kennedy's vision that launched the effort to get there, the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library Foundation hosted a daylong symposium highlighting the history that led to the first Moon landing, current scientific and technological space initiatives, and the future of space exploration.

JFK SpaceFest 2019: "The Eagle Has Landed"

This special daylong commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Apollo 11 Moon landing held on July 20, 2019 included sessions with engineer, inventor, and former NASA astronaut Dr. Franklin Chang Díaz, former NASA astronaut Daniel Burbank, NASA Spacesuit Engineer Su Curley, and inventor of the SuperSoaker and engineer Dr. Lonnie Johnson.

Augmented Reality and Free Kids' iPad app

JFK MOONSHOT 2019 Augmented Reality: Experience the Moon landing! JFK MOONSHOT 2019 is an augmented reality app. Instead of a traditional re-telling of the historic Apollo 11 mission, users relive it through an immersive experience—from Kennedy's moonshot announcement to the exploration of the Moon's surface. Whether you witnessed the landing in

1969 or are experiencing it for the first time, you're bound to learn something new and inspiring. Download the app in the Apple app store or on Google Play. <https://www.jfkmoonshot.org/>

JFK Challenge iPad app

The free JFK Challenge iPad app brings American history to life by turning kids (ages 9-11) into NASA and Peace Corps trainees ready to accept President Kennedy's charge to accomplish great things and make a difference in the world! <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/the-jfk-challenge/id957358011?l=s=1&mt=8>

Lesson Plans

Breaking Gender Barriers: A Female Space Trainee Advocates for Women in Space

In this lesson for 5th-8th graders, students gather historical evidence about gender discrimination by analyzing a letter written by Geraldyn "Jerrie" Cobb, a consultant to NASA Administrator James Webb, to President Kennedy. In it, she requests that women be included as astronauts in the space program and describes some of the obstacles she has faced in advocating for this change.

Kennedy's Quest: Leadership in Space

In this lesson for 9th-12th graders, students do a close reading of four primary sources related to the US space program in 1961, analyzing how and why public statements made by the White House regarding space may have differed from private statements made within the Kennedy Administration.

Race to the Moon!

In this lesson for elementary school students, a focus on the "Space Race" helps to develop their historical thinking skills. By examining an elementary student's letter to President John F. Kennedy, students will place a primary source document within its historical context and use that information to interpret the source.

[#Overview](https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/education/teachers/curricular-resources/elementary-school-curricular-resources/race-to-the-moon)

Space Quest

This web page challenges 3rd-8th graders to become experts on early space exploration. Students examine linked sources to discover key information about the space program during the Kennedy administration.

Why Choose the Moon?

In the lesson for 6th-9th graders, students examine President Kennedy's 1961 decision to send a man to the Moon by reading a letter written to the president by 13-year-old Mary Lou Reitler. They consider arguments in support of and opposition to using federal funds for space exploration both in the context of 1961 and the current debate on funding for NASA.