

One small step

One giant leap for mankind

MOONSHOT AT 50:

WHY DID WE GO, WHY DID WE STOP, WHAT DID WE GAIN AND WILL WE GO AGAIN?

COMMENTARY

BY JOHN M. LOGSDON

Author of "John F. Kennedy and the Race to the Moon"

Why did we stop exploring space? Isn't it time to start again? The trips to Earth orbit astronaut's have made in

the 45 years since the last Apollo mission have produced valuable scientific and technological payoffs, but they were not exploration. Michael Collins, the Apollo 11 astronaut who remained in orbit as Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin walked on the moon, has frequently commented that the lasting justification for human space flight is "leaving" — going away from Earth to some distant destination.

Apollo was space exploration at its best. Humans for the first time traveled to and explored another celestial body. It was a grand success, with positive impacts that have persisted to the present day. Fifty years later, the world is again celebrating that success. The Apollo missions to the moon will forever be a milestone in human experience, and particularly in the history of human exploration and perhaps eventual expansion. Its most lasting significance may well be simply that it happened.

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NASA

The first steps on the moon were viewed by a global audience and helped create a sense that the United States was a nation capable of achieving great things, with people deserving of respect and admiration, Logsdon says.

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