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Space Exploration Resources

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Space Exploration Resources

For thousands of years, humans have gazed into the sky to ponder its wonders and mysteries. Space exploration became a reality following the launch of the *Sputnik I* satellite by the Soviet Union in 1957 and the creation of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) by the United States in 1958. Interest in space exploration has intensified during the subsequent 50 years, and with the 25th anniversary of the *Challenger* disaster later this month and the scheduled retirement of NASA's Space Shuttle program later this year, space exploration will remain in the headlines throughout 2011. As a popular interest that continues to rivet the public, on-line historical resources related to space exploration are plentiful on the World Wide Web.

The NASA Web site, <http://www.nasa.gov/>, is an excellent resource for primary source materials that document U.S. space exploration. Researchers can navigate the Web site through different portals aimed at the general public, educators, students, or the media. Exploring the Web site can be time-consuming, but there is an impressive depth of information accessible to anyone motivated to learn more about space exploration.

Interested in the evolution of spacesuits from the earliest Mercury missions to the proposed future Constellation missions? Check out the Spacesuits and Spacewalks History Image Gallery,

<http://www.nasa.gov/audience/foreducators/spacesuits/historygallery/index.html>, which includes images from Ed White's 1965 spacewalk, the first by a U.S. astronaut. Images in the gallery are visually impressive, many are in color, and have been tagged with detailed descriptive information explaining the depicted missions. Best of all, the images can be viewed and downloaded at different sizes and resolutions.

Always interested in past NASA space missions, my next stop was, <http://www.nasa.gov/missions/index.html>, a database documenting every NASA excursion into space. Organized by mission name, users can click on a hyperlink to access in-depth information about a particular mission. For example, the "Apollo" section features many primary sources related to the program that brought the first humans to the moon, including text and audio of President John F. Kennedy's 1961 challenge to put a man on the moon before the end of the decade, digitized documents and images that date from the 1960s to the early 1970s, and numerous links to additional primary and secondary resources related to the moon missions. More recently, the "International Space Station" section lists every single mission to the station and features information about all of the astronauts and cosmonauts who have traveled there, including biographical details, interviews, images, blogs, and journal entries written while aboard the station.

Created by the Internet Archive, NASA Images, <http://www.nasaimages.org>, provides access to a mind-boggling number of digitized images and video related to the history of the U.S. space agency. The images are divided by topic, can be searched by keyword, and are all labeled with copious amounts of information. The site features useful zoom and download capabilities for both low- and high- resolution images, and registered users can save and select images for sharing with other users. Thinking about the 25th anniversary of the *Challenger* disaster, I browsed the numerous images from that fateful January day in 1986, and was able to effectively narrow my search results using the site's "What," "Where," "Who," and "When" categories.

As an Executive Branch agency, NASA's history is closely intertwined with a number of U.S. presidents. The launch of *Sputnik I* occurred during the administration of President

Dwight D. Eisenhower, and the Web site for the Eisenhower Presidential Library contains detailed information and records documenting how the U.S. responded to the Soviet satellite, http://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/research/online_documents/sputnik.html. Especially fascinating among the digitized primary source documents are the texts of Eisenhower speeches aimed at reassuring U.S. citizens about the security of the nation. Eisenhower's successor in the Oval Office, John F. Kennedy, named the U.S. space program as one of his top priorities, and primary sources related to his push for American space superiority are available on the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library & Museum Web site, <http://www.jfklibrary.org/JFK/JFK-in-History/Space-Program.aspx>. The Web site provides access to a variety of multimedia resources, including a behind-the-scenes audio recording of Kennedy meeting with NASA Administrator James E. Webb, color photographs of Kennedy's 1963 visit to the NASA launch site at Cape Canaveral, Florida, and a 1998 oral history interview with astronaut John Glenn, who was the first American to orbit the Earth in 1962.

As a number of famous astronauts are natives of the Midwest, several significant archival collections documenting space exploration have been donated to repositories in the MAC region. Purdue University is home to the papers of Neil Armstrong, the first astronaut to walk on the moon, and selections from this collection have been digitized and made available through the Purdue University e- Archives, <http://earchives.lib.purdue.edu/>. Searching the CONTENTdm-based repository for "Neil Armstrong" will yield numerous images and other resources documenting not only Armstrong's time as an astronaut, but also his involvement as an active university alumnus. In fact, Purdue University boasts 23 alumni who went on to become astronauts, and the university also houses the papers of astronauts

Eugene Cernan, Janice Voss, and Roy Bridges, Jr.

The Ohio State University Archives houses the John Glenn Archives, which contains a wealth of documentation and records related to Glenn's time as a navy pilot, astronaut, businessman, and his 24 years in the United States Senate. The collection's Web site, <http://library.osu.edu/find/collections/ohio-congressional-archives/john-h-glenn-archives>, includes a complete finding aid that divides his political and nonpolitical papers and highlights audiovisual materials and artifacts. Digitized photographs and images of artifacts are accessible through impressive photo galleries that are organized by topic, such as "Family," "Military," "NASA," "Senate," and "Post-Senate," and each image is supplemented with descriptive metadata and copyright information. All of the images are available for download and can be used for research, reaching, and private study.

Another notable on-line source at the John Glenn Archives Web site is an interactive exhibit entitled *Friendship 7: 40 Year Legacy* that remembers Glenn's famous 1962 space flight. The exhibit includes a debriefing report written by Glenn shortly after he returned to Earth and transcripts of radio communications during his flight, which provide a minute-by-minute account of Glenn's three orbits around the Earth. Additionally, the Web site contains a chronology of Glenn's life, a biographical sketch, an essay on his political career, and a selected bibliography.