CO : JFK's Space Race Speech, 1962

Background : https://www.rmg.co.uk/stories/topics/space-race-timeline

What even started the Space Race?

Following the Second World War, the United States and the Soviet Union competed to see who had the best technology in space. This included events such as the first satellite to orbit Earth, the first human-crewed spacecraft and the first person to walk on the Moon. The Space Race was considered vital by the two nations as it showed the world which country had the superior scientific, economic and political systems.

The Space Race and the Cold War

Following the Second World War in 1946, tensions rose between two of the victors; the Soviet Union (USSR) and the United States (US) The primary source of conflict arose from the struggle between two political beliefs of communism (USSR) and capitalism (US). This conflict became known as the Cold War.

The term cold in this context meant that there was no direct fighting between the two sides, but each sponsored and supported many conflicts across the world. The Cold War lasted until 1991 with the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The Space Race played a significant part in the Cold War as the Americans and Soviets competed to prove their technological and intellectual superiority by becoming the first nation to put a human into space. From beginning to end, the world's attention was captivated by this contest for dominance.

Who won the Space Race?

With no official measure of success, the winner of the Space Race is a point of controversy. Most historians agree that the space race ended on 20 July 1969 when Neil Armstrong stepped onto the Moon for the first time. As the climax of space history and exploration, the lunar landing led to a triumph for the US.

While the US set a man on the Moon first, their success was fed by a series of pioneering achievements by the Soviet Union. The Space Race can be seen as a climactic comeback for the United States starting in 1968, rather than a decisive victory.

Following the Moon landing, the Soviet Union concentrated their efforts on building a space station. On 7 June 1971, the Soyuz 11 spacecraft successfully docked with the Salyut 1 space laboratory and completed a record 22-day stay - demonstrating that space exploration would continue.

Furthermore, in May 1972, the US and the Soviet Union negotiated an easing of hostile relations. This "thaw" in the cold war led to cooperation between the two nations on future missions, and the Space Race became a joint venture.

How did the Space Race affect the world?

The Space Race has had a broader impact on society than just space exploration; here are some of the ways the world has changed.

Communication

The Earth is now surrounded by a network of satellites, which provide broadband communications and high-definition television, data used for weather reporting and GPS navigation and positioning. Many of these tools and systems were created and developed during the Space Race.

Medical

The image processing used in CAT scans and radiography were both initially developed for deep space imaging and photography. NASA's innovations into shock absorbent materials also helped create more functionally dynamic artificial limbs.

Technology

The world's first portable computer and mouse were created for space exploration and adapted for the commercial markets. Even the wireless headsets we use today originate from NASA creating hands-free equipment for astronauts and pilots. One of the classic examples is NASA's creation of the ball-point pen for writing in space. However, the Soviet Union found a cost-effective method of using a pencil.