Space Exploration

FACT SHEET

Early Exploration

- Launched in 1958, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's first human spaceflight program was called Project Mercury.
- On April 12, 1961, Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin became the first person in space.
- On May 5, 1961, Alan Shepard, Jr. became the first American in space. His 15-minute flight was watched by some 45 million viewers.
- On July 20, 1969, Neil Armstrong and Edwin "Buzz" Aldrin became the first people to reach the moon.
- Launched in 1977, Voyager 1 and 2 have studied the planets Jupiter, Uranus, Saturn, and Neptune, explored their moons, examined their rings, and revealed elements like solar wind.
- On April 12, 1981, John Young and Robert Crippen launched the space shuttle program by piloting *Columbia* to space and returning successfully two days later.
- In 1983, shuttle astronaut Sally Ride became the first U.S woman in space.

Current Exploration

- NASA's current mission to send an astronaut to Mars is driven by development of the Orion crew exploration vehicle.
- The International Space Station is an orbiting laboratory and construction site that synthesizes the scientific expertise of 16 nations to maintain a permanent human outpost in space.
- The Hubble Space Telescope, designed to free astronomers of limitation, has imaging that is constantly getting better.
- Every day, Voyager I extends our reach deeper into space than any other human-made object.

Future Exploration

- NASA envisions the return of humans to the moon by 2020 in preparation for visits to Mars and possibly beyond.
- Moon mission are essential to the exploration of more distant worlds. The moon may be used as a forward base of operations on which humans learn how to replenish essential supplies by creating them from local material.
- In the future, Mars-bound vehicles assembled in orbit may take the first humans to the Red Planet.

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