# The Space Race

One of the areas in which the U.S. and the Soviet Union competed during the Cold War was in space technology, a competition that became known as the "Space Race." Following World War II, both countries were aware of the military advantages of rocket technology and both countries applied resources to it. They each also recruited German rocket scientists to help with their programs. The Space Race started in 1955 when the U.S. announced its intention to launch a satellite into orbit. The Soviet Union took this as a challenge and vowed to get a satellite into space first. Two years later, they did: on October 4, 1957, the Russians launched Sputnik I. The Americans followed four months later with Explorer I.

The Soviets also beat the U.S. in putting a man into space. On April 12, 1961, Yuri Gagarin became the first man in space. He orbited the Earth in a spacecraft called Vostok I. Three weeks later, astronaut Alan Shepherd became the first American in space aboard Freedom 7, though he did not orbit the Earth. That honor belonged to John Glenn, nearly a year later, on Friendship 7.

Embarrassed to be lagging behind the Soviets, President Kennedy told Congress in 1961 that he wanted the U.S. to be the first country to put a man on the moon. The Apollo Moon program began, in conjunction with the Gemini program, which developed technology for the Apollo spacecraft. After much trial and error, Apollo 11 was launched on July 16, 1969, with astronauts Neil Armstrong, Buzz Aldrin, and Michael Collins aboard. Four days later, Armstrong and Aldrin landed a lunar module called the Eagle on the surface of the moon. By 1975, U.S. Soviet relations were improving. With the first U.S.-Soviet joint space mission, the Apollo-Soyez project, the Space Race ended.