

# NASA's moon landing remembered today as a promise of a 'future which never happened'

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This is Professor Martin Parker of the University of Leicester School of Management. Credit: University of Leicester

NASA's footage of the first moon landing promised a future of sci-fi heroism that never came to pass, according to a new study.

The paper, by Professor Steve Brown and Professor Martin Parker, of the University of Leicester's School of Management, and Dr Lewis Goodings, of the University of Roehampton, is published in the *International Journal of Management Concepts and Philosophy*.

The first moon landing is overwhelmingly remembered as an exciting and important turning point in world history, which continues to inspire [space](#) exploration projects to Mars and beyond today.

However, the new study shows how NASA used images of the 1969 Apollo 11 moon landing to develop a narrative of its own importance for the [future](#).

The academics claim NASA carefully selected footage to present Neil Armstrong and his fellow astronauts as pioneering "cowboys" supported by "technological efficiency".

NASA's shots of the astronauts walking purposefully towards the launch bay – repeated regularly in TV coverage of the landing – were carefully crafted to mimic the slow walk of Cowboys in the cinematic tradition of Westerns, they argue.

The academics compare NASA's claim to historical importance with organisations like Walt Disney Productions and Pan American World Airways.

They also note how often the images were repeated in media – which "premeditated" the idea that the moon landing represented the future.

They contrast this with people's ideas today about how space travel actually progressed in the latter half of the 20th century – which saw only five further manned moon landings, ending in 1972.

The academics analysed more than 400 "memory cards" left by visitors to the National Space Centre – which contained people's recollections of the moon landing and the 1960s.

They found around half of the visitors' accounts contained included a

reference to the moon landing as a glimpse into a future which never came true.

Professor Martin Parker, Professor of Organisation and Culture in the University of Leicester's School of Management, said: "I have always been fascinated by science fiction and space travel. When I saw the moon landing in 1969, I had the idea that the future was going to be radically different – but it was a future that never happened."

Professor Parker said that in order to guarantee that it kept getting money from Congress, NASA worked very hard to from the 1960s onwards to develop the story of its importance for the future.

"The cards at the National Space Centre are very poignant. Lots of people will be able to say exactly where they were when they saw Neil Armstrong land on the Moon. It became part of the narrative of your life.

"But the notions of progress which were common in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s are now no longer as universally accepted. I don't think anyone believes that things only move forward for the better anymore."

Dr Lewis Goodings said: "This research highlights the intersections between our personal experiences of the event and the particular version of the past that is given to us through the media and other sources.

"I recall that one memory card recalled the moon landing as 'a really exciting event that seemed to open an exciting and modern era' and then added that this era was 'so quickly lost'.

"I feel that is a good example of the coming together of the NASA-inspired image of the [moon landing](#) and the actual experience of very little changing - 'so quickly lost'. It is here in this personal response

where we find that the image of [space travel](#) never came true."

Malika Andress, Head of Marketing at the National Space Centre, said: "The memory cards that our visitors have been sharing with us have been a great way to capture a unique insight into an important point in our social history.

"To understand that moment when children were excited to be woken from their sleep and sit in front of a grainy image to see something they would never forget. The Apollo astronauts were pioneers and to this day we strive as a people to achieve bigger and better things.

"Nowhere could this be more so than in [space exploration](#). Today we look to Mars and beyond, new nations enter the race for the next goals in space and we see a collaboration of countries that once competed, all for the betterment of our tiny planet."

## **Response from Professor George Fraser- Director of the University of Leicester Space Research Centre**

I was one of the generation inspired by Apollo (the Apollo 11 landing was two days before my 13th birthday) and now I am privileged to be one of 11 principal investigators (experiment leaders) for a spacecraft going to Mercury.

So for me, the hopes of that time did come true.

It is abundantly plain that Apollo was a historic anomaly, which could not be sustained economically then and could hardly be repeated now. But NASA, if it is to be criticised for not colonising Mars, should be praised for giving us a view of the solar system so comprehensive that [science fiction](#) is dull by comparison, all in less than 50 years.

As for the gunfighter walk down the gantry...  
These were mostly test pilots  
They knew the odds  
Two years before Apollo 11, the crew of Apollo 1 had made the same  
walk, and had burned to death.  
Yet still these men took those steps.  
And that was not image, but courage.

**More information:** The full paper, titled "Organizing images of futures-past: Remembering the Apollo Moon Landings", can be found here: [www.academia.edu/3776029/Organ ... Apollo Moon Landings](http://www.academia.edu/3776029/Organ...ApolloMoonLandings)

Provided by University of Leicester

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