

United States Exceptionalism: Its Peak and Decline

1972 marked the peak of U.S. exceptionalism, and the beginning of its decline. (Historical material comes from Wikipedia. Commentary is in [] square brackets.)

Apollo 17 was the eleventh and final manned mission in the United States Apollo space program. Launched at 12:33 a.m. EST on December 7, 1972, with a three-member crew consisting of Commander Eugene Cernan, Command Module Pilot Ronald Evans, and Lunar Module Pilot Harrison (Jack) Schmitt, Apollo 17 remains the most recent manned Moon landing (in fact, the most recent manned flight beyond low Earth orbit).

Apollo 17 was the sixth Apollo lunar landing, first night launch of a U.S. human spaceflight, and the final manned launch of a Saturn V rocket. It was a "J-type mission," including a three-day lunar surface stay, extended scientific capability, and the third Lunar Roving Vehicle. While Evans remained in lunar orbit above in the Command/Service Module, Cernan and Schmitt spent just over three days on the lunar surface in the Taurus-Littrow valley, conducting three periods of extra-vehicular activity, or moonwalks, during which they collected lunar samples and deployed scientific instruments. Cernan, Evans, and Schmitt returned to Earth on December 19 after a 12-day mission.

The decision to land in the Taurus-Littrow valley was made with the primary objectives for Apollo 17 in mind: to sample lunar highland material older than the impact that formed Mare Imbrium and to investigating the possibility of relatively young volcanic activity in the same vicinity. Taurus-Littrow was selected with the prospects of finding highland material in the valley's north and south walls and the possibility that several craters in the valley surrounded by dark material could be linked to volcanic activity.

Apollo 17 also broke several records set by previous flights, including the longest manned lunar landing flight, the longest total lunar surface extravehicular activity, the largest lunar sample return, and the longest time in lunar orbit.

On January 5, 1972, U.S. President Richard Nixon ordered the development of a space shuttle program. [The U.S. had already decided not to continue exceptionalism (leadership) in human space exploration. No Republican or Democratic administration since 1972 has remotely suggested reversing this decision.]

On March 1, 1972, the Club of Rome published its report *Limits to Growth*, predicting the overpopulation and resource-depletion scenarios that we are now experiencing. They did not, however, emphasize the importance of human influence on the global climate, other than mentioning "pollution." [Gasoline shortages and rationing during the Nixon years demonstrated that the U.S. was no longer exceptional regarding self-sufficiency in energy and other resources.]

On April 16, 1972, Apollo 16 (John Young, Ken Mattingly, Charlie Duke) was launched. During the mission, the astronauts achieve a lunar rover speed record of 18 km/h.

On May 26 Wernher von Braun retired from NASA, frustrated by the nation's unwillingness to pursue a manned trans-orbital space program.

On June 17 five White House operatives were arrested for burglarizing the offices of the Democratic National Committee at the Watergate.

On June 23 U.S. President Richard M. Nixon and White House chief of staff H. R. Haldeman were tape-recorded talking about using the C.I.A. to obstruct the F.B.I.'s investigation into the Watergate break-ins.

[Watergate represents the beginning of the decline of U.S. exceptionalism regarding democratic principles in domestic politics; this marks the beginning of a monotonically increasing anything-goes divisiveness, including the seditious criminalization of the Republican Party.]

On July 23 the United States launched Landsat 1, the first Earth-resources satellite. [Serious concerns for global resource and environmental limits started to take shape around globalism, further undermining the notion of U.S. exceptionalism.]

The United States withdrew from Vietnam, having lost the ill-conceived war after more than 12 years of fighting. [The U.S. was no longer colonially/militarily dominant vs. third-world nations.] U.S. military involvement officially ended on August 15, 1973, as a result of the Case-Church Amendment passed by the U.S. Congress. Saigon fell in 1975.

The Army of the Republic of Vietnam lost about 266,000 killed. The Vietnamese government stated in 1995 that a total of 2,000,000 Vietnamese civilians died in the war, including North and South Vietnam. U.S. armed forces reported 58,269 killed; 153,303 wounded; 1,664 missing in action.

On December 19, 1972, when Apollo 17 returned to Earth, the U.S. program of lunar exploration ended. The remaining Apollo missions were cancelled. [Apollo represented the peak of U.S. exceptionalism.]