



Gender and the Race for Space

Masculinity and the American Astronaut, 1957-1983

By *Erinn McComb*

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Chronicles the history of early spaceflight and asks how American gender culture shaped the public image of the American astronaut and spaceflight technology during some of the tensest years of the Cold War era

The American astronaut image was informed by early Cold War ideals of masculinity that helped mold a distinctly American (anti-communist) masculinity, which appeared—on the surface anyway—to resolve not only an American “crisis of masculinity” but helped win the Cold War on an ideological and popular level. This American image focused on strict gender binaries of man as the protector, controlling technology and containing communism, while woman was the passive actor with spaceflight technology—left behind in the home waiting for the return of the astronaut husband. Allowing women to fly into space would have represented a lack of individual control with spaceflight technology.

Readership

The book would be of interest to students at the undergraduate and graduate level in classes pertaining to the Cold War, Women’s History, Gender Studies, and courses on American Science and Technology.

Key selling points

- Chronicles the history of early spaceflight.
- Argues that the American astronaut image was informed by early Cold War ideals of masculinity.
- Establishes a post–World War II masculinity crisis dialogue.
- States that the American public discourse constructed the astronaut as an archetype of American masculinity.

About the Author(s) / Editor(s)

Erinn McComb, PhD, is Associate Professor of History at Del Mar College in Corpus Christi, Texas. She researches the intersection of gender with foreign policy, science, and technology.

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