



**Exploring the Unknown: Selected Documents in
the History of the U.S. Civil Space Program,
Volume VII: Human Spaceflight: Projects
Mercury, Gemini, and Apollo (The NASA History
Series)**

National Aeronautics and Space Administration

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One of the most important developments of the twentieth century has been the movement of humanity into space with machines and people. The underpinnings of that movement—why it took the shape it did; which individuals and organizations were involved; what factors drove a particular choice of scientific objectives and technologies to be used; and the political, economic, managerial, and international contexts in which the events of the Space Age unfolded—are all important ingredients of this epoch transition from an Earthbound to a spacefaring people. This desire to understand the development of spaceflight in the United States sparked this documentary history series. The extension of human activity into outer space has been accompanied by a high degree of self-awareness of its historical significance. Few large scale activities have been as extensively chronicled so closely to the time they actually occurred. Many of those who were directly involved were quite conscious that they were making history, and they kept full records of their activities. Because most of the activity in outer space was carried out under government sponsorship, it was accompanied by the documentary record required of public institutions, and there has been a spate of official and privately written histories of most major aspects of space achievement to date. When top leaders considered what course of action to pursue in space, their deliberations and decisions often were carefully put on the record. There is, accordingly, no lack of material for those who aspire to understand the origins and evolution of U.S. space policies and programs. This reality forms the rationale for this series. Precisely because there is so much historical material available on space matters, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) decided in 1988 that it would be extremely useful to have easily available to scholars and the interested public a selective collection of many of the seminal documents related to the evolution of the U.S. civilian space program. While recognizing that much space activity has taken place under the sponsorship of the Department of Defense and other national security organizations, the U.S. private sector, and in other countries around the world, NASA felt that there would be lasting value in a collection of documentary material primarily focused on the evolution of the U.S. government's civilian space program, most of which has been carried out since 1958 under the Agency's auspices. As a result, the NASA History Division contracted with the Space Policy Institute of George Washington University's Elliott School of International Affairs to prepare such a collection. This is the seventh volume in the documentary history series; one additional volume containing documents and introductory essays related to post-Apollo human spaceflight will follow. The documents selected for inclusion in this volume are presented in two chapters: one covering the Mercury and Gemini projects and another covering Project Apollo.

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