

Moonism

Frank H. Joyce

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Some ways to think about the meaning and significance of three white, Christian males, two of whom are members of the armed forces, going to the moon.

“This is it,” said Cal Rogers, an elderly Oklahoman, who stood beside a tent and sipped a container of coffee. “This is what we’ve been working and paying for so long? That’s why I’m here to see what its all about.” (*N.Y. Times* Wednesday July 16, 1969).

“What you are doing as you lift off to the moon will lift the spirit of the American people as well as the world,” (President Nixon, *N.Y. Times* Wednesday July 16, 1969.)

It’s a cinch that Cal Rogers wasn’t talking about the war in Vietnam. He was talking about the Moon.

Twenty years after having “lost” China, twelve years after having been embarrassed by the Commie Sputnik and while its armed forces are stymied in Vietnam, the United States of Amerika in the name of all its people has put a man on the moon.

If nothing else proving that no territory in the Universe is safe from U.S. expansionism and making one grateful that at least there are no “Indians” on the moon who will have to be slaughtered for their resistance to “progress.”

It would be useless, even wrong, to deny the accomplishment of putting some fellows on the Moon for a while and bringing them back. It is a monumental event. It is necessary, however, to put the accomplishment in some perspective.

First, the trip to the Moon is not man’s greatest adventure or humanity’s greatest achievement or anything of the kind. Even as an accomplishment of SCIENCE Moonism exists in a continuum of “progress.” Who is to say that it ‘is more profound than the internal combustion engine or the theory of relativity or the first rocket ships which were pioneered by Hitler’s scientists.

As SCIENCE Apollo 11 is largely synthetic. It puts together a set of technological achievements which have accumulated over the years and put them into one spectacular package.

In fact, according to an article in the current *Fortune* magazine, the major accomplishment of Apollo is supposed to be in packaging, the bringing together of thousands of diverse and complex elements into a single effort.

Indeed, that is why the Apollo is not to be understood or analyzed as SCIENCE or TECHNOLOGY. It is not so much a SCIENTIFIC as a social event.

It is a project which had occupied the labors of and minds and resources of thousands, perhaps millions of people. But so was the Chinese Revolution and with that as a standard Apollo 11 does not begin to compare. The humanity, drama, sacrifice, courage, struggle, effort, adventure and accomplishment of the one is as far from the other as the Moon is from the Earth.

For us as Amerikans, the Chinese Revolution (or even our own) is something incomprehensibly immense which our society renders tiny and insignificant. Moonism on the other hand, is the elevation of the relatively insignificant to the level of the colossal and super-human. That is one of the major purposes of the Apollo program. The creation and subsequent release of pseudo-collective achievement and social excitement.

This is a society fraught with contradictions which result from an archaic, anachronistic social and economic system. In practical terms, that means that people are tense, nervous, frustrated and insecure.

That anxiety seeks outlets whenever possible. Who can forget what happened in Detroit following the World Series Victory of the Detroit Tigers. A spontaneous people's celebration replete with ersatz racial amity ran wild for hours. If that much tension got released, one can only speculate about how much was present to begin with.

But the next day, everything was as it was. The burden which had been lifted from the people was imaginary. We had found that out the night before when in the midst of the turmoil we went around pretending ignorance and asked people if they were celebrating because the war was over. It wasn't over then and it isn't now.

The social excitement of Apollo 11 is much more manipulated, much more contrived, much more cynical than that even of the World Series. For 30 consecutive hours on all three networks we are not allowed to be concerned with anything else. Some of us are to be given the day off to celebrate.

The hype has been building for weeks. In the U.S. the advertising mentality is complete. Nothing that is nothing is allowed to speak for itself. No event, no person no nothing. Those who engineer these things are worried. What if the people in their ignorance do not understand this enormous thing we, oops that is, THEY have done?

What then? If we do not generate enough enthusiasm for this Moonism, how will we ever get Marsism?

And if there is not Moonism and Marsism, where will the money go? Money and Apollo 11?

Billions.

The economic function of Moonism is the liquidation of surplus productive capacity and wealth. Men are going to the moon because this social system does not allow them to think of anything better to do with all of the money they have accumulated. Perhaps it is a good thing since the only other thing they have decided to spend a lot of money on seems to be the War against the World, especially in Vietnam.

There are, we know, those who can think of better things to do with the money. They do not have any power in this system. Rev. Ralph Abernathy of SCLC was invited to the launching along with other VIP's by Dr. Thomas Paine the director of NASA. Paine is reported to have told Abernathy that if he could solve the problems which concerned Rev. Abernathy, poverty, racism, etc. by not pushing the lift off button, that he would not push it.

He pushed.

In a sense, of course, Paine was right. If the nation was interested in building human cities, ending poverty, etc. it probably wouldn't have created Moonism in the first place. It simply wouldn't have been able to. Hence, there wouldn't have been a button to push. Dr. Paine was simply reminding Rev. Abernathy of what he already knew, Those who wield power had already made an irrevocable decision. As long as they hold power so will their decisions prevail.

Moonism is not a problem, it is a symptom. Nor are "a misalignment of priorities" the problem. That too, is a symptom. The problem is the complex of structural and cultural economic and political and social forces which make the present "priorities" inevitable.

And the reason why it is impossible to separate out genuine pride and satisfaction over the Moon shot from the hype and manufactured social excitement is that it is all ex post facto. The American People did not decide to go to the moon, any more than they decided to fight a war in Vietnam. That group commonly known as the ruling class decided both.

They are now attempting, among other things, to use the Moon to assuage anxiety over the decision they made about the war.

Some of the hype then rings false because the achievement is too vicarious. People are asked to be proud for having paid their taxes without knowing what the money was spent for. The notion of a collective achievement is troublesome to impose on a culture which values individual greed and individual accomplishment above all else.

It is more troublesome when the decision to attempt the Moon shot was not really collectively arrived at in the first place. Who after all in this country ever had a chance to vote against it?

The fact remains that the manufacturers who have been throwing the lavish parties in Houston all that week have been buying case after case of liquor with the money that we taxpayers gave them, not to go to the moon, but to make such huge profits that they could rent entire motels in which to throw parties with case after case of liquor.

There is not a single contractor in the Apollo program who is known to have done his work or made his component for just cost or at a loss. Every one made a profit. So where is their patriotism? At the bank that's where! As

a vice-president of Chrysler said, in another regard, on page 74 of the May issue of *Fortune* magazine, “It’s pretty stupid to go ahead with a chauvinistic display of patriotism when the cost features aren’t there.”

And even if one were to take a loss it would be for the purpose of public relations and enhancing his ability to get other contracts from the military.

There is a human instinct of simple uncorrupted curiosity. A desire to explore the unknown, a wish to do the difficult and impossible. Such desires are distinct from greed and territorial conquest and white supremacy. How are we supposed to know which is involved in Apollo 11?

This is not to insist on purity. No human achievements are so pure. It is only to try to understand why the hypsters will fail—just as the Detroit Tigers failed.

All the King’s horses and all the King’s men cannot put Humpty together again. For a while the men on the moon will make everything seem all right.

Mysteriously, the wait for the DSR bus will not seem so long, the price of hamburger will not be so high, the factory will not be so noisy, the black people will not seem so menacing, the cigarette-pollution cough will not be so annoying, the kids will seem more respectful and the war will be forgotten.

But not for long. You can send men to the moon. But you cannot pack up a contradiction in a rocket ship and blast it away. In fact, the men on the moon will only make the contradictions more obvious.

Empires come and go. The pyramids however magnificent an achievement, did not save Egypt.

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