

# The Space Between: Cold War Rivalries, The Space Race, and the Fight for Civil Rights

Joanna Garcia

## Faculty Introduction

*Dr. Aaron Hyams*

Joanna Garcia's paper contributes to a growing body of literature that contextualizes the civil rights movement in post-WWII United States against the backdrop of the Cold War. She brought together primary sources and a solid review of the secondary literature to provide a fresh perspective on this topic. Focusing on Ralph Abernathy and the Poor People's Campaign's effort to picket the Apollo 11 launch, Garcia highlights the disparity between federal resource commitments made to defense versus those made to the War on Poverty. Occurring at a time, in 1969, when civil rights victories seemed to be fewer and farther between, since the heady summers of 1964 and 1965, Abernathy hoped to use the Apollo program as a foil to reignite a movement that he felt had lost momentum in the face of backlash to the riots of 1967 and the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr.

## Abstract

On July 15, 1969, Ralph Abernathy, a prominent civil rights leader, led 500 people, two mules, and a cart to the site of the Apollo 11 mission in Cape Canaveral, Florida. This protest was part of a larger effort known as the Poor People's Campaign. Occurring against the backdrop of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s death, Richard Nixon's election on "law and order," and significant White backlash to racial integration, the Poor People's Campaign wanted to make a statement about federal spending and priorities before the launch of the mission to the moon. This paper examines this pivotal moment by connecting the political motives of the civil rights movement to the Cold War and the Space Race to understand how it came to be that, at one of the most unifying moments in US history, there was still such a great divide.

On September 12, 1962, John F. Kennedy gave a speech at Rice University that fervently declared the United States' commitment to winning the Space Race. His notable words epitomized the nation's determination to conquer new frontiers amidst the intensifying Cold War rivalry with the Soviet Union:

We choose to go to the Moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard; because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one we intend to win, and the others, too.<sup>1</sup>

However, at that same moment, the nation also faced complex problems with racial and economic inequality. This struggle was not emphasized in the same way as the space race and the Cold War. In fact, by the end of the 1960s, desegregation and anti-poverty efforts were waning in the face of political backlash. One of the most prominent civil rights activists, Ralph Abernathy, aimed to bring the Poor People's Campaign to protest the Apollo 11 mission in order to draw attention to the disparate public investment in the Space Race as opposed to racial desegregation and anti-poverty programs.

With the beginning of the Cold War, there was a shift in geopolitical dynamics which was heightened by the accumulation of nuclear weapons and technology by both the US and the Soviets. Amidst escalating tensions fueled by suspicion and contrasting ideologies, the rivalry between these superpowers became increasingly intense. The conquest of space emerged as a symbolic battleground as they competed for supremacy on the world stage. This allowed for NASA to emerge as the figurative sword that the US wielded to wage a Cold War and combat communism.<sup>2</sup>

With the creation of NASA in 1958, the US government pushed to counter and even surpass the Soviets' progress associated with space

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<sup>1</sup> John F. Kennedy, "Address at Rice University on the Nation's Space Effort," speech presented at Rice University, Houston, Texas, September 12, 1962, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/archives/other-resources/john-f-kennedy-speeches/rice-university-19620912>.

<sup>2</sup> Karsten Werth, "A Surrogate for War—The U.S. Space Program in the 1960s," *Amerikastudien/American Studies* 49, no. 4 (2004): 564, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41158096>.

exploration. This was especially salient after the launch of Sputnik I and II in 1957.<sup>3</sup> The US found themselves embroiled in a geopolitical competition, racing to claim the upper hand, symptomatic of the broader tensions of the Cold War and the ideological clashes between communism and capitalism. In the late 1950s, many Americans weren't quite as consumed with the idea of military operations associated with space exploration and technological advances. They appeared to be concerned with more earthly issues, such as the economy. According to Kim McQuaid, "[t]he US slid into a sharp recession in late 1957, and jobless rates reached 7.5 percent: the highest in a decade. Pocketbook issues mattered most to Americans."<sup>4</sup> This didn't stop the increasingly aggressive budget that the US poured into NASA and its respective programs.<sup>5</sup>

NASA's budget from 1959 to 1961 ranged between \$330.9 million in 1959 to \$964 million by 1961.<sup>6</sup> By the time Apollo 11 was launched in 1969, the budget had reached \$4.3 billion (about \$13 per person in the US).<sup>7</sup> This was a significant increase in a short period of time but something that the US government felt compelled to do to be successful against the Soviets.

It wasn't until 1961, after the Soviets put cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin into space, that the US government and President John F. Kennedy started to fight the Cold War through a space race. According to Karsten Werth, "[w]ith each new phase of the arms race, the political leadership further emphasized the fundamental importance of developing and displaying technological power as a means to provide the necessary

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<sup>3</sup>Kim McQuaid, "Sputnik Reconsidered: Image and Reality in the Early Space Age," *Canadian Review of American Studies* 37, no. 3 (October 2007): 376, doi:10.3138/cras.37.3.371.

<sup>4</sup>McQuaid, 375–376.

<sup>5</sup>Rita G. Koman, "Man on the Moon: The U.S. Space Program as a Cold War Maneuver," *OAH Magazine of History* 8, no. 2 (1994): 42–50. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25162945>.

<sup>6</sup>Jane Van Nimmen, Leonard C. Bruno, and Robert L. Rosholt, *NASA Historical Data Book 1958-1968, Volume 1: NASA Resources* (Washington, D. C.: National Aeronautics and Space Administration, 1976), 115, <https://www.nasa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/sp-4012v1.pdf?emrc=8c55eb>.

<sup>7</sup>NASA, *FY 1969 Budget Estimates Volume 1: Summary Data*, (1968), <https://planetary.s3.amazonaws.com/assets/pdfs/FY1969-Budget-Estimates-Volume-1-Summary-Data.pdf>.

credibility to deterrence.”<sup>8</sup> This was especially salient with Kennedy’s presidency because he had been looking for a way to unite the country and “the conquest of space for the welfare and security of the ‘free world’ looked like a promising solution. Some even suggested it could be the purpose that the nation had been searching for in the face of spreading communism.”<sup>9</sup> Kennedy did this by publicly emphasizing the urgency of space exploration, particularly, landing a man on the moon as one of the US’s primary goals by the end of the 1960s.<sup>10</sup>

The two defining speeches Kennedy made in 1961 and 1962 conveyed the importance of landing an American man on the moon. This opened the doors to the idea of not only exploring space, but also spending a considerable amount of money on technological projects through NASA under the guise of national security.<sup>11</sup> He stated in his first speech, “We propose additional funds for other engine development and for unmanned explorations—explorations which are particularly important for one purpose which this nation will never overlook: the survival of the man who first makes this daring flight.”<sup>12</sup> This was a plea to the public to look beyond the cost, and to the frontier of space where a new “war” would be fought, one without men killed on the battlefield, but one that was no less important.<sup>13</sup> Kennedy’s second speech further solidified the need for America to be the front-runner of a vast, new frontier:

we choose to go to the Moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard; because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one we intend to win, and the others, too.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Karsten Werth, “A Surrogate for War” 568.

<sup>9</sup> Werth, 571.

<sup>10</sup> Werth, 572.

<sup>11</sup> Werth, 581.

<sup>12</sup> John F. Kennedy, “Address to Joint Session of Congress,” speech presented to the Joint Session of the United States Congress, Washington, D.C., May 25, 1961, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/historic-speeches/address-to-joint-session-of-congress-may-25-1961>.

<sup>13</sup> Werth, “A Surrogate for War,” 573.

<sup>14</sup> Kennedy, “Address at Rice University.”

During this time, the public greeted the challenge with a blend of patriotic optimism and a sense of unease, as Werth points out: “Anxiety over its technological inferiority—whether real or imagined—incited an urgency that had thus far only appeared in times of war.”<sup>15</sup>

The combination of anxiety and patriotic fervor only propelled the Apollo 11 mission into overdrive, and “many Americans were convinced that their work was an important contribution to the containment of communism.”<sup>16</sup> This was especially true for the NASA employees who worked tirelessly and in most cases in isolation, leaving them unaware of major events outside of the Apollo program.<sup>17</sup> Going into the 1960s, the push for the mission to be successful often left other areas in American society to fall to the wayside, such as financial burdens, civil unrest, and inequality that was prevalent amongst a sizable portion of the US.<sup>18</sup>

The 1960s were marked by widespread social, political, and economic upheavals. It was a decade that championed change while also emphasizing unity, especially in rallying the United States against the Soviet Union. However, not all Americans felt the unity that was touted by the US government; many felt disillusioned and angry at their circumstances.<sup>19</sup> A substantial number of Americans lived in poverty, and this was part of a greater socioeconomic problem that was especially pronounced among African American communities. According to the 1970 US Census, 24.3 million people had incomes that were below the poverty level, or about 1 in 10 families.<sup>20</sup> The same census report also stated that “families headed by a person of Negro and other races were poor at a rate of about 27 percent in 1969, a more than three times the poverty rate of about 8 percent for white families,” an issue that was illusive for the government, yet glaringly demonstrative of the times.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Werth, “A Surrogate for War,” 573.

<sup>16</sup> Werth, 575.

<sup>17</sup> Werth, 575.

<sup>18</sup> Anthony C. Cooke, “Black Community, Media, and Intellectual Paranoia-as-Politics,” *Journal of Black Studies* 42, no. 4 (2011): 609–26, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41151362>.

<sup>19</sup> Cooke, 609–26.

<sup>20</sup> US Census Bureau, “Income of Families and Persons in the United States: 1969,” *Current Population Reports*, Series P-1, no. 76 (Washington, D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 1970), <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/1970/demographics/p60-76.pdf>.

<sup>21</sup> US Census Bureau, 1.

Some attempts to reform the socioeconomic issues plaguing nearly one-fifth of the US population included Kennedy's foundational efforts at analyzing and combating elements of poverty on several levels. At the time of his death, his administration had "antipoverty plans that emphasized youth, human services rather than income transfers, experimentation, selectivity, coordination, and local administration."<sup>22</sup> Despite the promising beginnings of these antipoverty initiatives under Kennedy's leadership, his untimely death left them incomplete.

Nevertheless, his legacy inspired continued efforts to address socioeconomic disparities in the United States as seen with Lyndon Johnson and his war on poverty in 1964. After Kennedy's death, Johnson carried on as the late president would have with the issue of poverty and many of Kennedy's other policy commitments.<sup>23</sup> Johnson also knew that this moment was his opportunity to make his mark, saying that "If you do good, you'll do well," and through the notion of the eradication of poverty, he realized he could have his "do good" issue during his presidency to help solidify his legacy.<sup>24</sup>

In his State of the Union address on January 8, 1964, Johnson discussed the importance of approaching the issue of poverty not just from the point of view of one or two things, but something comprehensive including new programs, training, food assistance, housing support, healthcare, and better schools. He stated, "our aim is not only to relieve the symptom of poverty, but to cure it and, above all, to prevent it."<sup>25</sup> At the time, this was an ambitious plan for poverty eradication, and over the next five years between 1964 and 1969, unemployment rates improved from 5.2% to 3.5%.<sup>26</sup> However, there was also a substantial difference between White unemployment rates and Black unemployment rates. According to the Department of Labor, White unemployment rates

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<sup>22</sup> Carl M. Brauer, "Kennedy, Johnson, and the War on Poverty," *The Journal of American History* 69, no. 1 (1982): 98–119, doi: 10.2307/1887754.

<sup>23</sup> Brauer, 115.

<sup>24</sup> Brauer, 115.

<sup>25</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson, "Special Message to the Congress Proposing a Nationwide War on the Sources of Poverty," speech presented to the United States Congress, Washington, D.C., January 8, 1964, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/special-message-the-congress-proposing-nationwide-war-the-sources-poverty>.

<sup>26</sup> "Table B-42: Civilian unemployment rate, 1964–2010," in Economic Report of the President (Washington, D.C.: Government Publishing Office, 2011), <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/ERP-2011/pdf/ERP-2011-table42.pdf>.

ranged from 4.1% in 1964 to 3.1% in 1969 and Black unemployment rates ranged from 8.1% in 1964 to 6.4% in 1969.<sup>27</sup> This marked difference in unemployment was evidentiary of larger issues.

Civil rights leaders were instrumental in fomenting the changes necessary to combat systemic inequality and racially driven policies. However, after 1965, there had been several instances of slowed progress and outright cessation to the advancement of rights politically and economically for African Americans. Some of the most critical instances had to do with the failed attempts to pass the Fair Housing bill in 1966 and 1967, as well as the riots in the summer of 1967, which prompted the creation of the Commission on Civil Disorders which was chaired by Governor Otto Kerner, Jr. of Illinois.<sup>28</sup>

In 1967, riots and civil unrest were commonplace in many cities throughout the US. The Kerner Commission's primary goal was to figure out the causes of the unrest. It determined that the lack of fair housing for African Americans contributed significantly to the unrest and that a solution for adequate housing needed to be brought forth.<sup>29</sup> However, there had already been two failed attempts at the Fair Housing bill.

The Fair Housing bill, although lobbied extensively by civil rights activists such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., had continued to be pushed aside because "whites still resisted fair housing laws through political channels."<sup>30</sup> There was a fear that if African Americans were allowed to move into White neighborhoods that the values of their homes would go down.<sup>31</sup> It wasn't until 1968, after Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated and the Kerner Commission's reports came out, that the Senate and the House finally passed the Fair Housing Act that President Johnson signed.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> "Table B-42."

<sup>28</sup> US Department of Housing and Urban Development, "History of Fair Housing," accessed July 18, 2024, [https://www.hud.gov/program\\_offices/fair\\_housing\\_equal\\_opp/aboutfheo/history](https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/fair_housing_equal_opp/aboutfheo/history).

<sup>29</sup> US Department of Housing and Urban Development.

<sup>30</sup> William J. Collins. "The Political Economy of State Fair Housing Laws before 1968," *Social Science History* 30, no. 1 (2006): 27. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40267897>.

<sup>31</sup> Collins, 27.

<sup>32</sup> Bill Lann Lee. "An Issue of Public Importance: The Justice Department's Enforcement of the Fair Housing Act," *Cityscape* 4, no. 3 (1999): 35–56. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20868474>.

After Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination in 1968, Abernathy was set to inherit the presidency within the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), a position advocated by Dr. King himself. An editorial published by the Washington Post on May 26, 1968, stated:

The mission of Ralph David Abernathy is the fulfillment of the dream of Martin Luther King. He inherited the mantle of leadership, directly from Dr. King, although he always stayed in the background when Dr. King was alive. It was Dr. King's wish that, if anything should happen to him, his friend should succeed him in their work.<sup>33</sup>

This succession was demonstrative of Abernathy's longstanding dedication to the cause, as he transitioned from a supportive role to a central figure in advancing civil rights.

After Abernathy became president of the organization, he continued the fight for economic equality through an effort known as the Poor People's Campaign. Tracy Power describes the campaign as something that "would be an effort to forge a new movement, one that would focus on social problems rather than racial ones, and one that would encourage the participation of all citizens who sought to change American society—whites as well as blacks."<sup>34</sup> The campaign's discussions initially began in November 1967 and despite Dr. King's untimely death in April 1968, the planned campaign forged ahead. On May 4th, over 3,000 individuals marched on the Washington Mall, resolute in their purpose, and stayed until June 24th.

The SCLC and Ralph Abernathy felt that their Poor People's Campaign initiatives were overshadowed during that period by the Cold War and the Space Race, and wanted a more prominent stage to expand visibility

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<sup>33</sup>Robert C. Maynard, "The Poor People's Leaders: Poor People's Cadre Falls in Behind Abernathy Endorse Philosophy Mr. Abernathy Decides Ralph D. Abernathy Andrew J. Young James Bevel Hosea Williams the Rev. Jesse Jackson the Rev. Bernard Lafayette," *The Washington Post, Times Herald* (1959-1973), May 26, 1968, <https://ezproxy.shsu.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/poor-peoples-leaders/docview/143551104/se-2>.

<sup>34</sup>J. Tracy Power, "I Will Not Be Silent And I Will Be Heard: Martin Luther King, Jr., the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and Penn Center," produced by the Public Programs Division, 1993, Columbia: South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Topics in African American History 2.

for their cause.<sup>35</sup> They sought to bring awareness to the juxtaposition of what the government spent their money on, such as technology versus their people. Thus, the SCLC pushed forward to their next protest, which would be at one of the most “unifying” events in US history, the Apollo 11 mission on July 16, 1969, at the Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Florida.<sup>36</sup>

The Apollo 11 Mission was set to take off on July 16, 1969; however, the day before, Ralph Abernathy, 500 protesters, two mules and a cart flooded the area outside the gates of Kennedy Space Center with the intent to protest the exorbitant cost associated with the mission and what it meant for not just African Americans, but all people living below the poverty line.<sup>37</sup> According to Neill Maher, “Civil rights leaders were particularly concerned that NASA and the space race were diverting public attention as well as federal funding from programs aimed at improving the urban environment.”<sup>38</sup> In a powerful gesture, Abernathy and protestors leveraged the Apollo 11 mission to draw attention to socioeconomic disparities, emphasizing the diversion of resources from critical social programs.

Abernathy also seized upon this moment to reignite momentum for the civil rights movement, which had been waning. He notably achieved this feat because, as “*Jet* magazine argued soon after the protest, no other civil rights demonstration organized by Abernathy has reached more people and served a role as his attendance at the launching of Apollo 11.”<sup>39</sup>

The protest unfolded with a sense of restrained fervor, as participants engaged in chanting, singing, and displaying handwritten picket signs bearing messages like “Hungry kids can’t eat moon rocks” and “Help,

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<sup>35</sup> Nick Kotz, *Judgment Days: Lyndon Baines Johnson, Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Laws That Changed America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005), 422. <https://archive.org/details/judgmentdayslynd00kotch/page/422/mode/2up>.

<sup>36</sup> “Poor People’s Campaign to Demonstrate at Cape,” *New York Times*, July 13, 1969. <https://ezproxy.shsu.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/poor-peoples-campaign-demonstrate-at-cape/docview/118688031/se-2>.

<sup>37</sup> Neil M. Maher, *Apollo in the Age of Aquarius* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2017), 11-12, <https://search-ebshost-com.ezproxy.shsu.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e000xna&AN=1491541&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

<sup>38</sup> Maher, 22.

<sup>39</sup> Maher, 51.

we are starving.” The atmosphere echoed with the harmonies of various songs, including one with a poignant chorus declaring “no more mean white folks.”<sup>40</sup> Amidst the ongoing demonstrations and speeches, the scene persisted until NASA director Thomas O. Paine emerged to personally address Abernathy.

When the two men met face to face, Abernathy asked, “are we the nation that will spend billions of dollars to put a man on the moon and will not spend sixty dollars to put one on his feet?”<sup>41</sup> He argued to Paine that although the technology that America was wielding was extraordinary, it was not something that helped the domestic issues at hand. NASA and the US Government needed to find ways to help its people here on Earth before it started to try to build a new frontier in space.<sup>42</sup>

This resonated with Paine, he felt moved by what Abernathy had said, and told Abernathy that “if it were possible for us not to push that button tomorrow morning and solve the problems you are talking about, we would not push that button.”<sup>43</sup> Following their discussion, Abernathy asked Paine if some of the families that were there protesting could watch the launch at the launch site, to which Paine agreed. Abernathy and about ten other families got to sit in the VIP launch area to watch the rocket take off.<sup>44</sup>

Abernathy used the opportunity while sitting alongside politicians and other dignitaries to further drive home the importance of what was happening out in the areas where poverty was significant. He wanted to expose the truth of the America he had grown up in and to push leaders to do what was in the best interest of the American people. He achieved as much because “such media exposure of civil rights activism, much

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<sup>40</sup> Smithsonian Channel, “This Group Protested America’s Bid to Put a Man on the Moon,” February 12, 2020, video, 1:01, <https://youtu.be/Emjzly7LvcY?si=quA7vd7PxgbTN9Co>.

<sup>41</sup> Smithsonian Channel, 1:11.

<sup>42</sup> Julian Scheer, “The “Sunday of the Space Age,” *The Washington Post, Times Herald* (1959-1973), Dec. 08, 1972, <https://ezproxy.shsu.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/sunday-space-age/docview/148350308/se-2>.

<sup>43</sup> Scheer, 1:26.

<sup>44</sup> Steve Huntley, “Abernathy Leads Group: ‘Poor People’ Get VIP Seats At Moon Launch,” *New Journal and Guide*, July 19, 1969, *Protest Black Studies*, B4, <https://ezproxy.shsu.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/abernathy-leads-group/docview/569040518/se-2?accountid=7065>.

like the coverage of Apollo itself, also went global.”<sup>45</sup>

The public’s response was overwhelming to say the least, with numerous media outlets picking up the story:

United Press International even captured a Poor People’s Campaign organizer, Hosea Williams, during the demonstration using a black power salute directly underneath two NASA rockets, and it circulated the image worldwide to the newswire’s more than 6,000 media subscribers.<sup>46</sup>

But, what did this mean in the context of the civil rights movement and America’s issue with poverty? Did Paine really mean what he said when he promised to work with Abernathy, or was this just another problem that could be put on the backburner in the wake of wars, egos, and technological advancement?

Unfortunately, there was a limited amount that was done by Paine or NASA to curtail poverty following the protest at the Apollo 11 mission, but the overall campaign did succeed at garnering support for some policy changes as well as creating awareness about social issues that had previously been neglected. Among some of the more prominent policy changes that were attributed to the Poor People’s Campaign were that “Congress extended existing labor programs, and the Senate approved an additional \$5 million for Head Start and \$13 million for summer jobs.”<sup>47</sup> There were also changes within the school systems, where “Congress appropriated \$243 million to expand and revamp school lunches to help feed hungry children.”<sup>48</sup> While these policy changes marked some progress spurred by the Poor People’s Campaign, they were just a fraction of the reforms needed to address the challenges associated with poverty in the United States.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Maher, *Apollo in the Age of Aquarius*, 51.

<sup>46</sup> Maher, 52.

<sup>47</sup> “1968 Poor People’s Campaign: Challenges and Successes,” National Museum of African American History and Culture, accessed April 15, 2024, <https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/stories/1968-poor-peoples-campaign-challenges-and-successes>.

<sup>48</sup> “1968 Poor People’s Campaign.”

<sup>49</sup> Sarah Anderson, Marc Bayard, Phyliss Bennis, John Cavanag Sarkar, Basav Sen, and Ebony Slaughter-Johnson, “Executive Summary,” in *The Souls of Poor Folk*, eds. Saurav Sarkar, Shailly Gupta Barnes, and Aaron Noffke, Institute for Policy Studies, 2018, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep27364.4>.

In the 1960s, Cold War fears and paranoia had propelled the US government's foreign anxieties into overdrive, and with that came the creation of NASA, and eventually Apollo 11. However, the expense and the fervor that went into the program and its mission were not held in an idyllic light for many Americans. The portion of Americans who held the expense of the Apollo 11 mission in contempt were the people who were also fighting for civil rights and who wanted to see the money that the government was spending on the mission to go toward social and economic issues.<sup>50</sup>

The civil rights movement had been the main proponent for social changes of the time, and Ralph Abernathy and the SCLC choosing to bring the Poor People's Campaign to the Apollo 11 mission helped to amplify the voices of many living in poverty. Although the Poor People's Campaign was somewhat effective in increasing attention and changing policy for the better, the US government's foreign affairs, and the Space Race proved to be the real driver of policy and monetary distribution.<sup>51</sup> Regardless, this era proved to be a time of great turmoil, yet also one that had considerable transformation. What Ralph Abernathy and the Poor People's Campaign did in front of those gates at Kennedy Space Center will forever serve as the reminder that the people of the United States will always fight injustice, even if it's only with 500 people, two mules, and a cart. ■

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<sup>50</sup> Maher, *Apollo in the Age of Aquarius*, 21–23.

<sup>51</sup> Teasel Muir-Harmony. "The Space Race and American Foreign Relations," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of American History*, Feb. 27, 2017, accessed July 20, 2024, <https://oxfordre.com/americanhistory/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199329175.001.0001/acrefore-9780199329175-e-274>.

## Student Biography

Joanna Garcia graduated from Sam Houston State University in spring of 2024 with her Bachelor of History and a minor in Political Science. Through her senior seminar class, she was prompted by her professor, Dr. Aaron Hyams, to research and write about a topic in American History post-WWII. Within these parameters, she knew she wanted to write about some aspect of the Cold War, which ultimately led her to the Apollo 11 mission, which then led to the protest at the launch site. She found it to be fascinating that the Cold War, the Space Race, and civil rights could all be connected at such a poignant moment and wanted to create a paper that would reflect the importance of it. Joanna plans to pursue a law degree at South Texas College of Law or University of Houston Law in 2025.