

Abstract: History and Analysis of French Contributions to Space Exploration

By Carol Miselem

Arts and Sciences, French, Modern Foreign Languages and Literatures

Advisor: Sébastien Dubreil

Associate Professor and Chair of the French/Francophone Studies Program

Humans have always dreamed of exploring space. We are drawn by the unknown, and what greater unknown is there than the universe? Nowadays, space exploration is no longer a distant dream, but a reality that allows us to study the universe and our own world from a unique standpoint.

While the story of the Space Race between the USA and the USSR is widely known, the story of France and how it became the third space power is far too often overlooked. Out of the ashes of WWII, France rose behind these two nations to become a leader in rocketry and telecommunications satellites. To this day, it is the aerospace capital of Europe and home to headquarters for the European Space Agency (ESA).

France's space history is a story of globalization, compromise, and politics. This project traces back the critical historical events that lead to the eventual creation of ESA and the forming of closer ties between post-war European nations, focusing specifically on France's role. It then seeks to answer two questions. First, how do ESA member states balance between cooperation and competition? And second, what do the lessons learned over the past century signal for the future of European space exploration?