



TOUCHDOWN

25 Years Since Tranquility Base

by Buzz Aldrin

Between Christmas 1968 and the end of 1972 two dozen Americans had the great fortune to be the first emissaries from Earth to set foot on another world. We were privileged, at that moment, to be the eyes and hands for all humanity—a species with the audacity to dig a hole in the ground, recombine the minerals and fly to the Moon. For one crowning moment, we were creatures of the cosmic ocean, a moment which may be seen a thousand years hence as the signature of our century.

Yet an eerie apathy now seems to afflict the very generations who witnessed that event. The past quarter century has seen not only a withered capacity for wonder, but a growing retreat to dreams of a risk-free society—to a world without awe that would diminish and trivialize all that it touches. Ironically, the view of the whole Earth from space has confirmed for many the notion that we should make our pilgrimage not to the stars but to the needs of suffering humanity. There is a tendency to see outer and inner space—like matter and spirit, or pride and humility—as mutually exclusive. But the dynamic is a ten-

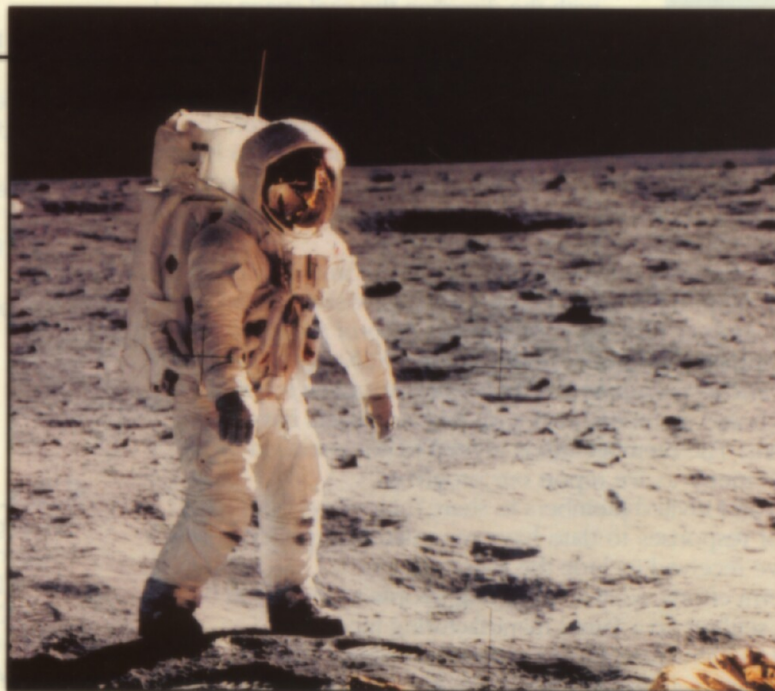


Photo: NASA

Buzz Aldrin takes a walk on 20 July 1969.



sion of opposites: A whole people must have the humility to nurture the Earth *and* the pride to go to Mars, for neither goal is finite and either alone is the proverbial sound of one hand clapping.

In another quarter century, by the 50th anniversary of the first landing on the Moon, most of its participants will have passed into history. Join us on this occasion in urging a renewed commitment to the continued exploration of the solar system, a challenge that can bind together

nations, inspire the young, advance science and ultimately end our confinement to one vulnerable world. Beyond these ends, our space program stands with the cathedrals and pyramids among the great projects of history, epic social feats that embody the spirit of an age. They are the dreams of the child in us, arising less from the ethic of work than from the spirit of play, rooted less in means than in meaning itself. All the rationales reduce to one simple truth: We will walk on Mars in the spirit of wonder that sets our species apart. ☆

Buzz Aldrin was pilot of the Lunar lander Eagle on the Apollo 11 mission.