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For many Americans, the Apollo 11 lunar landing of 1969 is a source of national pride, and proof of the United States triumph over the Soviet Union. Oftentimes it is overlooked how the United States was able to beat the Soviet Union to the moon, a timeline which began in 1945. In the waning days of World War 2, the United States facilitated the movement of Nazi scientists, engineers, and rocketeers to the United States as a part of Project Overcast. Many of these scientists greatly influenced competition with the Soviet Union in the following decades, and were directly responsible for landing U.S. astronauts on the moon. The key factors of the United States' victory over the Soviet Union was the execution of Project Overcast and the integration of former Nazi personnel into agencies such as NASA.

### Section 1: Project Overcast

There were three factors that led to the origin of Project Overcast, and the eventual creation of Operation Paperclip. First, Allied intelligence agencies were actively seeking any intelligence that could be used for military or industrial benefit, in addition to putting an end to the war in the Pacific. Second, both President Truman and the Pentagon understood that the advanced German technology could be used against the increasingly aggressive Soviet Union. Lastly, in the final days of World War 2, as the defeat of the German Reich became clear, many German scientists began seeking ways to avoid association with the Third Reich and its atrocities. This took form in the United States purposely seeking German personnel, and secretly transporting them out of Germany.

Anticipating a German defeat and a continued conflict with Japan, the United States and Britain created a variety of intelligence task forces to take advantage of the German defeat. The

Combined Intelligence Objectives Subcommittee (CIOS) was a precursor to Project Overcast. The CIOS was given three main objectives. First, to find out what the Germans knew about weapons, radar, synthetic rubber, synthetic fuel, torpedoes, rockets, jet engines, infra red, communications, and other technologies. Second, to gather information that could help to shorten the war against Japan. Third, to locate and detain German scientists and technicians to interrogate them for information identified above and to prevent them from slipping away to seek safe haven in another country and continue their wartime research and development programs and projects<sup>1</sup>. These objectives quickly developed into an effort to funnel German scientists into the United States without much resistance or background checks. Beginning in early 1945, CIOS teams began sweeping German factories, laboratories, universities, and installations. During this timeframe there was a complete lack of background checks into who was being brought over. Most likely, many war criminals and staunch Nazi sympathizers entered the United States. The reasoning behind this lack of investigation mainly stemmed from a lack of communication between the CIOS and the rapidly advancing Allied military from both fronts. When American forces came from the east, they often left population centers devastated and any possible asset had been destroyed or relocated. When Russian forces came from the west, they often forcibly removed CIOS teams in order to gain any advantage for the Soviet Union<sup>2</sup>. The efforts of the CIOS had a dual impact on the world stage by enabling the United States to begin developing the next generation of technology and denying the Soviets.

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<sup>1</sup> Gimbel, John. "U.S. Policy and German Scientists: The Early Cold War." *Political Science Quarterly* 101, no. 3 (1986): 433–51. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2151624>.

<sup>2</sup> Gimbel, John. "U.S. Policy and German Scientists: The Early Cold War." *Political Science Quarterly* 101, no. 3 (1986): 433–51. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2151624>.

Project Overcast was able to deny the Soviets any advantage in the coming years following World War 2. It made possible the transfer of 643 foreign specialists to military installations, industrial laboratories, and universities in the United States<sup>3</sup>. By acquiring these specialists, the United States was able to simultaneously boost its own technological development, while keeping these important assets out of the hands of the Soviet Union. The Germans brought their advancements in jet propulsion, rocketry, air to land missiles, and much more. Under Project Overcast, anyone taken from Germany was to remain under strict military supervision in specified bases. However, the dropping of the atomic bomb in Hiroshima and Nagasaki greatly shifted the United States' interests. Seemingly overnight, many German scientists in transit to the United States were abandoned. The thought process being that the United States no longer needed an edge over Japan because the war would soon be over. This choice would end up being disastrous, as those same German scientists abandoned across Europe would simply return to Germany, and be placed under the authority and influence of the Soviet Union. This would effectively place advanced German technology and ideas in the hands of both the Soviet Union and the United States, and would ultimately create the catalyst for the Cold War and the space race<sup>4</sup>.

Relocation to the United States became an increasingly appealing option to many Germans seeking to escape association with the Third Reich, avoid the much more vengeful Soviet Union rapidly closing from the west, and to continue their work for the United States. Despite the moral implications, the United States' slowly began the movement of asylum seeking

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<sup>3</sup> LASBY, CLARENCE G. "PROJECT PAPERCLIP: GERMAN SCIENTISTS COME TO AMERICA." *The Virginia Quarterly Review* 42, no. 3 (1966): 366–77. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26443040>.

<sup>4</sup> Gimbel, John. "U.S. Policy and German Scientists: The Early Cold War." *Political Science Quarterly* 101, no. 3 (1986): 433–51. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2151624>.

Germans to the military facilities in New Mexico. Out of concern that the American public would react harshly to the integration of former Nazis into their society, the United States government purposely kept the relocation of these scientific and technological assets somewhat secret. Starting as soon as the Allies divided Berlin and Germany, the United States inticed Germans to come to the United States with high salaries, remaining with their families, and occasionally outright abductions<sup>5</sup>. That is not to say the United States government was entirely on board with adopting former Nazis into their society. The Secretary of War, Robert B. Patterson, effectively shut down Project Overcast in 1946 out of fear of having enclaves of German scientists in close proximity. However, President Truman reestablished the initiative under the name Operation Paperclip, continuing the integration of German scientists, engineers, and technology for the next several decades. The key difference between Project Overcast and Operation Paperclip would be the intensive and meticulous background checks on any German personnel brought to the United States, and upon completion of the check, German personnel would be granted citizenship.<sup>6</sup>

## Section 2: The Cold War

The transition to Operation Paperclip had a strong, long lasting effect. With Japan defeated, the United States was able to completely turn its attention to the growing Soviet Union. Specifically, the beginning of the arms race and the competition in nuclear weapons and power.

## Section 3: NASA and the Apollo Missions

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<sup>5</sup> LASBY, CLARENCE G. "PROJECT PAPERCLIP: GERMAN SCIENTISTS COME TO AMERICA." *The Virginia Quarterly Review* 42, no. 3 (1966): 366–77. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26443040>.

<sup>6</sup> LASBY, CLARENCE G. "PROJECT PAPERCLIP: GERMAN SCIENTISTS COME TO AMERICA." *The Virginia Quarterly Review* 42, no. 3 (1966): 366–77. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26443040>.

Research Topic: Operation Paperclip and its effect on American space exploration.

- Research into the Allied intelligence agencies worked to secure scientific research in the final days of World War 2. Additionally, how the recovered personnel and technology impacted the United States' development during the arms race with the Soviet Union and the culmination of the space race.

Research Question: Why did the United States use former Nazi scientists, and how did this decision affect the development of the space program?

- Research to answer the question of why the American government was interested in obtaining the technology and scientific discoveries of Nazi Germany. Was the goal to gain an advantage over the Soviet Union before the Cold War? How did German technology aid the United States' space program? Were the contributions of former Nazi scientists truly crucial to the success of the Apollo 11 mission?

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Paragraph 1: Operation Paperclip

- The transfer of Nazi scientists and the scrubbing of their records/involvement in the party.

Paragraph 2: Wernher Von Braun

- Involvement in the V2 rockets during World War 2 and the Saturn V and Apollo 11 programs.

Paragraph 3: Apollo 11

- Contributions of German science to the first lunar landing.

Sources:

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