



Breaking the Chains of Gravity: The Story of Spaceflight before NASA

Amy Shira Teitel

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NASA's history is a familiar story, culminating with the agency successfully landing men on the moon in 1969, but its *prehistory* is an important and rarely told tale. America's space agency drew together some of the best minds the non-Soviet world had to offer. At the end of World War II, Wernher von Braun escaped Nazi Germany and came to America where he began developing missiles for the United States Army. The engineer behind the V-2 rocket, von Braun dreamt of sending rockets into space. Ten years later his Jupiter rocket was the only one capable of launching a satellite into orbit.

The National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics and the U.S. Air Force, meanwhile, brought rocket technology into the world of manned flight. NACA test pilots like Neil Armstrong flew cutting-edge aircraft in the thin upper atmosphere while Air Force pilots rode to the fringes of space in balloons to see how humans handled radiation at high altitude.

Breaking the Chains of Gravity looks at the evolving roots of America's space program--the scientific advances, the personalities, and the rivalries between the various arms of the United States military. After the Soviet launch of Sputnik in 1957, getting a man in space suddenly became a national imperative, leading President Dwight D. Eisenhower to pull various pieces together to create the National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

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