

Reflections on the Moon

After a day of participation, impressions on several aspects of a moon voyage:

•
The accomplishment. When President John F. Kennedy, acting on Vice-president Lyndon B. Johnson's suggestion, declared that a landing in the 1960's would be national policy, a reasonable bookmaker gave thousand-to-one odds against success. That the voyage could occur without a serious hitch from liftoff to splash-down is magnificent.

•
The ifs. If all of the money had gone to poverty, urban plight or civil rights . . . If we were spending on social needs what we spend on professional baseball, liquor, cosmetics . . . If plants canning dog food were feeding hungry people . . .

The simplistic view that you solve problems by throwing other people's money at them is becoming doubtful by the number of times the throwers miss their aim. If somebody can generate the will and discover the methods, we think that the money is available. We hope sincerely that all of us can conquer hunger, civil disrespect, urban plight and poverty, and we see little relation between these matters and space exploration.

•
Nationalism and politics. The moon belongs to everyone, and we felt some embarrassment at the number of times "American" got into the discussions. If the astronauts felt any at Nixon's inter-

ruption of their work with a platitudinous speech, they hid it.

We liked the sentiment of Walter Annenberg, US ambassador to Britain, who said American moon men might find one of the British, the traditional explorers, ahead of them. The trip was largely for national pride, but sometimes encouraging the other fellow's self-respect pays bigger dividends. For example, with the moon race won, might we not save time and money by buying our supersonic planes abroad—or not having any at all?

•
Dangers. After dire warnings from some biologists and confident assurances from others, we are happy that at least so far no malicious microbes have shown their existence.

•
Science. We must wait awhile to see what information will come from moon samples and measurements. Probably it will be small compared with the cost. Guessing the value of a new frontier, though, is probably as futile as guessing in 1935 whether nuclear research would lead to nuclear power.

•
Significance. The biggest aspect of the voyage was what it did to man. He must feel stronger and taller for being able to take on and accomplish a Herculean task. He must feel confident of his fellows because so many of them watched and cared. Perhaps with new strength and confidence he will tackle new Herculean problems, including those that are social.

—R. Hobart Ellis Jr