On 19 September 1961 NASA Administrator James E. Webb announced that the Agency’s Manned Spacecraft Center, which would serve as the command center for the Apollo missions and future human spaceflight programs, would be located near Clear Lake in southeast Houston, Texas, on 1,020 acres of land donated to the government by Rice University. Following the announcement, Congressman William C. Cramer of Florida and Senator Benjamin A. Smith of Massachusetts cited political pressure from influential Texans (including Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson, who headed the Space Council, and Texas Congressman Albert Thomas, whose district included Houston and who controlled NASA’s funds as chairman of the House Appropriations Committee) as the reason why Houston was selected as the site for the NASA Center. During the next year, members of the Space Task Group transferred from the NASA Langley Research Center in Hampton, Virginia, to Houston, where they worked in temporary facilities throughout the city while awaiting the completion of the federal laboratory.¹

When President John F. Kennedy arrived in Houston on 11 September 1962 to see the construction of NASA’s Manned Spacecraft Center (MSC) and visit Rice University, he greeted nearly 200,000 Texans at the city’s airport by saying:

I do not know whether the people of the Southwest [Texas] realize the profound effect the whole space program will have on the economy of this section of the country. The scientists, engineers, and technical people who will be attracted here will

¹ The Houston Chronicle, 19 September 1961, 20 September 1961; The Houston Post, 20 September 1961; “Houston Manned Spacecraft Center,” 10 September 1962, NASA 1960s Vertical Files, Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston, TX. An additional 600 acres of land were purchased by NASA in 1962.
really make the Southwest [Texas] a great center of scientific and industrial research as this nation reaches out to the moon. In this place in America [Texas] are going to be laid the plans and designs by which we will reach out in this decade to explore space.\(^2\)

The president’s promise was impressive and the prophetic statement came true as the Agency’s decision to establish a center near Clear Lake propelled Texas into the Space Age by transforming rural towns in the area into highly visible communities that surrounded a unique facility for the training of astronauts and the control of their spaceflights. During this period of rapid growth, local businesses and nearby schools flourished. The federal installation also brought millions of dollars and enticed highly educated technical specialists into the area. The relocation of national aerospace companies to the Clear Lake area created new jobs and the need for more support services, which primarily added to the diversification of Texas’s and the Gulf Coast’s economy. The close relationship that the MSC established with local academic institutions expanded their graduate programs, accelerated their research projects, and enlarged their curriculums to meet the needs of the space program. The immense effects that the installation had on Texas ranks alongside other notable events in the state’s history, including the discovery of oil at Spindletop, the opening of the Houston ship channel, and the creation of the petrochemical and refining industries following World War II. NASA indeed launched Houston into orbit by contributing to the population, economic, scientific, and technological buildup that the region experienced during the 1960s.\(^3\) This essay focuses on southeast Texas between 1961 and 1969 in an effort to demonstrate how the federal complex represented a catalyst to Houston’s economy and enhanced the area’s colleges and universities.

Prior to NASA’s decision to locate a research facility in Houston, the Clear Lake area had population of 6,520 people. Most of the land in the region, which sold for less than $750 an acre, was devoted to cattle and agriculture. There were also several producing oil and gas fields in the adjacent town of Friendswood. The largest nonagricultural industry was oyster and shrimp fishing, which was centered in the neighboring communities of Seabrook and Kemah.\(^4\)

As a direct result of the MSC location, the Humble Oil and Refining Company and Del W. Webb formed the Friendswood Development Company to create a planned community, known as Clear Lake City, on 15,000 acres of land adjacent to the Center. During the 1960s, the development company oversaw the construction

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of office buildings, service stations, restaurants, motels, shopping centers, banks, a
golf course, a recreation center with swimming pool and baseball field, apartment
complexes, and hundreds of homes. With all of these amenities, many of the leading
scientists, engineers, and technicians working at the federal laboratory made Clear
Lake City their home. By the late 1960s, the area’s population exceeded 45,000
people and land values had skyrocketed as half-acre sites sold for more than $6,000.
Aside from the rapid growth and booming land prices, the area’s economy benefited
from the $100-million development project because Houston developers utilized
local labor to construct the residential subdivisions and commercial buildings.\textsuperscript{5}

Just across the road from the NASA Center were lush pastures owned by
Colonel Raymond Pearson. With the need for additional housing and commercial
facilities to be built around the MSC, a group of Houston businessmen sought to
capitalize on the area’s rapid development by purchasing a 570-acre tract of land
from Pearson to develop a community known as Nassau Bay. On 15 September
1963 David Bell, who was an aerospace technologist working at the MSC, and his
family became the first residents of Nassau Bay. As other NASA employees and
workers from the local aerospace companies moved into the development, Nassau
Bay’s residential sales exceeded $5 million by the fall of 1964. Aside from residential
homes, Nassau Bay also included shopping centers, a bank, several apartment units,
two motels, a post office, and an office complex which housed the MSC’s press
corps and more than 25 space-oriented firms. Additionally, the community had
its own telephone company and a power plant operated by Thermal Systems Inc.,
which supplied year-round metered air conditioning and heating to the commercial
buildings, townhouses, and apartments.\textsuperscript{6}

Established communities near the NASA site also shared in the land boom
during the 1960s. Prior to the construction of the MSC in Houston, Hurricane
Carla struck the Texas coast on 11 September 1961, which destroyed most of the
Seabrook community and discouraged many of the local residents from rebuilding.
Thus, the area soon became a ghost town. However, news of the federal government’s
plans to establish a NASA facility nearby revived the community’s hopes and spirits.
During the 1960s, Seabrook experienced rapid growth as NASA employees and
aerospace company contractors moved to the area. By 1967, the Seabrook Chamber
of Commerce reported that the town’s population exceeded 5,400 residents. As

The Houston Magazine (March 1962): p. 69; The Houston Chronicle, 12 February 1967; Lang, “Impact
of MSC on the MSC Area”; The Houston Chronicle, 26 May 1963; “One Small Step . . . A Giant

\textsuperscript{6} The Houston Chronicle, 26 May 1963, 21 June 1962, 15 September 1963, 20 October 1963; The
Houston Post, 29 September 1963, 22 November 1964, 28 August 1977; The Houston Press, 21 June
1962; Suburban Journal (Clear Lake City, TX), 5 September 1963; Spaceland Star (Webster, TX), 25
February 1965.
Seabrook’s population continued to increase, the community needed additional facilities and services to accommodate the new influx of citizens. Therefore, the once-quiet fishing village witnessed the construction of new shopping centers and subdivisions that included 100 new homes and 1,000 apartment units. Road conditions were also improved in Seabrook when a two-lane drawbridge was built over the Clear Creek channel that connected Clear Lake with Galveston Bay.7

In 1960, Friendswood, which was 10 miles west of the Center, represented a small rural town of about 75 Quakers who were living off the Texas oil boom with mainly an agricultural lifestyle. When the MSC was built in the Clear Lake area, the small town developed into a suburban community as new residents moved to the area.8 Dramatic growth led to the construction of two water wells, a new sewage disposal plant, several subdivisions, shopping centers, and a new drugstore. Other notable town improvements included the establishment of a new medical clinic, which housed Friendswood’s first doctor and dentist. Many of the MSC employees and aerospace contractors, including Director of Flight Operations Christopher C. Kraft, Jr., Flight Director Glynn S. Lynn, and astronaut Donald K. Slayton, made Friendswood their home. By the late 1960s Friendswood was no longer a quiet country village, but the Quaker influence was still visible within the community because local grocery and convenience stories did not sell alcohol.9

The economic impact of the MSC on Houston was felt immediately as national aerospace companies established regional marketing, service, and engineering liaison offices in the area.10 Robert H. Brewer, who served as manager of the Houston Chamber of Commerce, said this represented “one of the greatest concentrations of national corporate interests brought to focus on a single major metropolitan area in so short a period of time.”11 By 1966, more than 125 firms had established offices in the Clear Lake area. Among the largest space-oriented companies were the Philco Houston Operations of Honeywell Inc., North American Aviation Inc., General Electric, Lockheed Electronics Company, International Business Machines’s Federal System Division, Raytheon Company, Thompson Ramo Wooldridge (TRW) Systems Inc., Volt Technologies Corp., the Univac Division of Sperry-Rand,

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10. Letter, Fred Staacke to Kenneth S. Pitzer, 30 January 1962, The Kenneth Pitzer Papers, Box 11, Woodson Research Center, Fondren Library, Rice, University, Houston, TX.

Beckman Instruments Inc., Texas Instruments Inc., and Federal Electric Corp. At first, the firms came to Houston to work exclusively with the Agency, but many of them stayed as the Apollo program drew to a conclusion because they viewed the area as a new base for expansion and diversification. During the late 1960s the companies provided their services to the nearby petrochemical industries and engineering businesses in the Houston area. Thus, the space-oriented firms assisted in diversifying Texas’s economy. However, a majority of these companies are no longer in business today as budgetary constraints in the space program forced them to close operations or consolidate with other aerospace firms. 

Aside from national research and development companies relocating to the Clear Lake area to compete for the Agency’s contracts, new businesses were established and others were expanded to provide supplies, equipment, and services to the Center. In January 1962, Gulf Aerospace Corp. was one of the first companies to be organized as a result of the NASA facility. The firm received a contract from the Agency to develop medical equipment designed to monitor an astronaut’s heart rate during spaceflights. Another enterprise was the A-OK Business Service, which was established in Houston to provide secretarial and telephone answering services for the institution. By 1967, the firm expanded its operations by providing a placement service for temporary and permanent employees in adjacent Harris and Galveston Counties. Other companies included Test Equipment Corp. and Geo Space Corp., which provided electronics support for the space-oriented firms in the Clear Lake area. By the late 1960s, the total amount of NASA contracts awarded to these companies, along with other Houston-based businesses cooperating with the MSC, was more than $643 billion, which was poured directly into Texas’s economy. Thus, the federal funds encouraged and supported future growth and expansion in southeast Texas.

More meaningful to the Houston and Clear Lake area economy was that local firms obtained contracts and awards for space-related projects and construction work at the NASA Center. Among the first Houston companies to receive a


NASA award was Brown & Root Inc. In February 1962 the construction company was the recipient of a $1,499,280 contract for architectural design work on the MSC. Other local engineering firms to benefit from the Agency’s awards was S.I.P. Inc. of Houston, which was awarded a contract for $272,522 to build and install a space environmental chamber at the NASA facility. Following the successful flight of Apollo 8, NASA awarded the Houston-based A-V Corp. a contract to develop a documentary that utilized the first close-up motion pictures of the lunar surface. In 1966, Warrior Constructors Inc. of Houston and the National Electronics Corp. of Houston were the recipients of a NASA contract for $4.3 million to construct and equip the Lunar Receiving Laboratory, which would house the returned lunar samples collected by the Apollo astronauts.

While economic growth and progress was transpiring near the Clear Lake site, colleges and universities throughout the Houston area witnessed these benefits and viewed the establishment of a permanent relationship with federal research complex as a way to enhance their academic prestige and prosperity.

Rice University in Houston was one of the initial educational facilities in the area to be influenced by the arrival of the NASA complex. On 4 January 1963 Dr. Kenneth S. Pitzer, who was president of the 70-year-old university, announced the establishment of the Space Science department at Rice. Prior to the announcement, several institutions around the United States, including the University of California at Berkeley, the University of California at Los Angeles, the University of Michigan, and the University of Maryland offered postgraduate work on the subject, but these programs were usually only part of a physics department or of a college-affiliated space research center. Therefore, Rice represented the only college or university in America to have a department devoted exclusively to space science. MSC Director Robert R. Gilruth welcomed the establishment of the new department at Rice University. “We expect it to be of great assistance in carrying out the mission of the Manned Spacecraft Center,” he said. The benefit of the Space Science department would result from being able to train highly specialized professional and technical NASA employees at Rice University,
which was less than 40 miles away from the federal site, instead of sending them to institutions on the either the West or East coasts.22

Rice’s Space Science department provided research and graduate-level instruction in geomagnetism, Van Allen radiation, aurora, atmospheric structures and dynamics, planetary structures, and meteorites.23 Dr. Alexander J. Dessler, who was appointed chairman of the new department, stated that the establishment of a Space Science department had a large regional value because it expanded space research in the state of Texas and contributed to making Rice University one of the top academic institutions in the nation.24

The Space Science department grew remarkably during the 1960s. For instance, the faculty expanded from 4 in the spring of 1963 to 17 by December 1967. The graduate student enrollment increased from 9 in September 1963 to 50 in three years. Many of the graduate students who enrolled in the Space Science department were MSC employees and local aerospace contractors who sought to broaden their understanding of sounding rockets, satellites, astronomy, planetary and meteoritic structures, quantum mathematics, and astrophysics.25

Aside from being the recipient of several NASA research grants, Rice also cooperated with the MSC by providing research and teaching facilities for the scientist-astronauts, where they were able to maintain proficiency in their specific fields of study while they were involved in astronaut training at the NASA Center. The close proximity of Rice University and the MSC made the research facilities at the institution convenient to the scientist-astronauts so they could keep up with their scientific work without involving extending amounts of travel time.26

22. “Summary,” n.d., The Kenneth Pitzer Papers, Box 11, Woodson Research Center, Fondren Library, Rice University, Houston, TX.
23. Memo, K.S. Pitzer to Deans and Department Chairs, “Instruction and Research in Space Science,” 2 January 1963, The Kenneth Pitzer Papers, Box 11, Woodson Research Center, Fondren Library, Rice University, Houston, TX.
24. “Summary,” n.d., The Kenneth Pitzer Papers, Box 11, Woodson Research Center, Fondren Library, Rice University, Houston, TX; Kenneth Pitzer, “Rice University and Houston in the Space Age,” 7 December 1961, The Kenneth Pitzer Papers, Box 49, Woodson Research Center, Fondren Library, Rice University, Houston, TX.
26. Letter, A. J. Dessler to Dr. Harry Hess, 19 June 1963, The Kenneth Pitzer Papers, Box 11, Woodson Research Center, Fondren Library, Rice University, Houston, TX.
One of the most notable outgrowths of Rice’s Space Science Department was that NASA awarded the university a $1.6 million grant to construct a Space Science and Technology Building to house the institution’s rapidly expanding research activities. The building consisted of offices, conference rooms, a high-speed computer center, environmental testing facilities, materials research facilities, and a low-level radiation laboratory. During the late 1960s, 18 faculty members, 31 graduate students, and 10 postdoctoral students worked on 35 space-related projects, including meteorite experiments, cosmic rays measurements, solar wind investigations, and aurora studies in the Space Science and Technology Building. The success of these projects enabled Rice to become the first college or university in the United States to receive approval from the Agency to design and development its own satellites under the new University Explorers Program sponsored by NASA. Although Rice University was ranked as one of the top 20 academic institutions in the nation prior to the arrival of the MSC, the close partnership that the university developed with the Center enhanced the school’s national and international prestige.

The success of the Space Science department also contributed to Houston developing a new image that never existed before the 1960s. The city had always been viewed as the center of the oil and gas industry, but Rice’s program and the MSC caused the nation to recognize southeast Texas as a site for space-oriented research and development.

Probably one of the greatest impacts that NASA had on Rice University was that the national government passed a resolution in July 1963 which stipulated that after 16 August 1964, federal agencies were restricted from awarding contracts to colleges or universities that discriminated because of race, creed, color, or national origins in their admission process. At this time, Rice University was the only


31. D.W. Lang, interviewed by Robert B. Merrifield, 3 May 1967 and 9 May 1967, transcript, Box 3, Center Interviews, JSC History Collection, University of Houston-Clear Lake, University Archives, Houston, TX.

nonsectarian, private institution in the South that prohibited the admission of African American students. Thus, President Pitzer and the Board of Governors recognized that if they failed to remove racial restrictions on student admission, the university would suffer the consequences of losing NASA grants.\textsuperscript{33} The possibility that Rice could have become ineligible to receive research funds from the Agency represented an ironic twist because one of the main reasons why the NASA installation was centered in Houston was the availability of Rice’s scientists and research facilities.\textsuperscript{34}

In February 1964 the Rice trustees filed a petition asking for District Court authority to disregard racial restrictions set out by the university’s founder, William Marsh Rice, in an 1891 indenture.\textsuperscript{35} The trustees claimed that race discrimination prevented the institution from receiving federal research grants and hampered the recruitment of first-rate students and faculty members.\textsuperscript{36} A Rice alumni group headed by Congressman Albert Thomas, whose district encompassed Rice University, also filed a petition in support of the trustees’ request. On 11 February 1964 District Judge William M. Holland of the 127th District Court heard Rice’s case.\textsuperscript{37} During the suit, Tom Martin Davis, who was the attorney for the university’s trustees, argued in favor of integration by stating, “Rice University today stands at the crossroads—it could go to the moon or it could return to the 19th century.”\textsuperscript{38} After the jury deliberated, they found that it would be impossible for Rice University to develop as a first-class educational institute if African Americans were barred from enrollment.\textsuperscript{39} A month later, District Judge Holland ruled that Rice University’s trustees had the authority to remove racial barriers prohibiting the admission of qualified students. With the desegregation of Rice, the institution became eligible once again to receive NASA research grants.\textsuperscript{40} In the spring of 1965, Raymond Johnson became the first African American to be admitted to Rice University.\textsuperscript{41}

The arrival of the MSC in Houston also led to significant changes at the University of Houston. During the early 1960s the academic institution witnessed the close relationship that existed between Rice University and the Agency, so

\textsuperscript{33} Memo, K. S. Pitzer to Members of the Board of Governors, “New Non-Discrimination Requirements of Several Government Agencies,” 16 October 1963, The Kenneth Pitzer Papers, Box 16, Woodson Center, Fondren Library, Rice University, Houston, TX; The Houston Press, 11 February 1964.

\textsuperscript{34} The Houston Post, 22 February 1963.

\textsuperscript{35} The Houston Post, 22 February 1963.

\textsuperscript{36} The Houston Chronicle, 13 February 1964.

\textsuperscript{37} The Houston Chronicle, 9 February 1964; The Houston Press, 10 February 1964.

\textsuperscript{38} The Houston Press, 20 February 1964.

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., and 9 March 1964.

\textsuperscript{40} The Houston Post, 10 March 1964; The Houston Chronicle, 9 March 1964.

\textsuperscript{41} Memo, K. S. Pitzer to Members of the Board of Governors, “Annual Report: 1963–64,” The Kenneth Pitzer Papers, Box 17, Woodson Center, Fondren Library, Rice University, Houston, TX.
the University of Houston expanded its interests and needs to keep pace with the Space Age. For instance, the university inaugurated doctoral programs in physics, mechanical engineering, and electrical engineering after recognizing the need for higher-trained personnel in these fields. Dr. Clark Goodman, a professor of physics, developed a course entitled “Aerospace Science and Engineering,” which focused on space environments, temperature controls, heat protection, and launch vehicles. In the fall of 1963 nearly 40 graduate students and seniors enrolled in the course. Aside from Goodman’s daily lectures, students had an opportunity to discuss the current activities and operations at the NASA Center with MSC officials, including Maxime A. Faget, who served as Assistant Director of Engineering and Development; Bryan R. Erb, who worked in the Structures and Materials Branch; David M. Hammick from the Space Technology Division; and Chief of the Space Radiation and Space Environment Division Jerry L. Modisette. This new space engineering class at the University of Houston represented one of the first courses of its type in the nation.

Aside from this course, the university jointly sponsored a variety of educational and research programs with the NASA complex, such as the Summer Faculty Fellowship Program, Sustaining University Program, Employee Graduate Training Program, and Pre-doctoral Traineeship Program. Dr. F. M. Tiller, who served as the dean of the College of Engineering, stated, “[T]he establishment of NASA programs aided in the progress and development of the school by accelerating plans that were already underway.” Thus, the cooperative efforts assisted the University of Houston in improving its stature as an academic institution in the Southwest.

With the continued expansion of population and industry in the Clear Lake area, the community required additional opportunities for higher education. By 1964, the University of Houston offered undergraduate and graduate courses ranging from elementary Russian, mathematics, physics, political science, and business administration to MSC employees in temporary classrooms at the NASA Center in Houston. However, Center Director Robert Gilruth, seeking more educational opportunities, urged the university to expand its operations in an effort to more effectively serve the interests of NASA employees, residents of the Clear Lake area,

42. The Houston Post, 8 September 1963.
45. The Houston Post, 10 February 1963.
and workers at the various aerospace companies. Additionally, he noted that the area’s large technical and scientific community made this need more imperative.  

On 25 November 1965 the Humble Oil and Refining Company donated 50 acres of land west of the MSC to the University of Houston to establish a branch campus. The president of the university, Dr. Philip G. Hoffman, who accepted the land gift for the board of regents, said, “[S]uch gifts would not only be acceptable, but welcome.” Following the announcement, Paul E. Purser, Gilruth’s executive assistant, stated that the establishment of a branch campus near the facility would provide a healthy and vigorous university climate in the area. After acquiring the necessary building funds from alumni gifts and private industries, construction began on the property in the early 1970s. Regular scheduled classes at the University of Houston at Clear Lake City began in September 1974 with a total enrollment of 1,069 students and a faculty comprised of 60 professors. Thus, the establishment of the branch campus contributed to the proper development of the state’s scientific and industrial strength. 

Additional Houston-area educational institutions benefited from specific NASA-related projects, such as the University of St. Thomas, which received funds from the Agency to conduct studies relating to the genetic effects of weightlessness; Baylor University College of Medicine, which was awarded a $258,000 space medicine grant to monitor astronauts’ brain waves and blood volume during human spaceflights; the University of Texas Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences, which was awarded a $65,000 grant to collect the astronauts’ clinical history data for medical researchers; the Texas Institute for Rehabilitation and Research, which was awarded a $171,183 grant for the development of computer technology for a medical data study relating to the Apollo program; and the Southwest Research Institute of Houston, which was the recipient of a $104,850 grant to assist the Agency in disseminating NASA technological developments to local businesses for

46. The Houston Post, 27 November 1965; The Houston Post, 24 November 1965; The Houston Chronicle, 25 November 1965; The Houston Post, 16 March 1963; Letter, Robert R. Gilruth to Dr. Philip G. Hoffman, 10 September 1965, The Philip G. Hoffman Papers, Box 9, Special Collections and Archives, University of Houston Libraries, Houston, TX.
47. The Houston Post, 27 November 1965; The Houston Post, 24 November 1965; The Houston Chronicle, 25 November 1965; The Houston Post, 16 March 1963; Robert R. Gilruth to Dr. Philip G. Hoffman, 10 September 1965, The Philip G. Hoffman Papers, Box 9, Special Collections and Archives, University of Houston Libraries, Houston, TX.
49. Ibid.
commercial applications.51 By the late 1960s, the total amount of Agency funds awarded to these respective educational facilities and research institutions was more than $3.6 million.52 These NASA grants differed from other research and development funds because they required highly paid and educated workers who demanded higher levels of education and residential accommodations. Houston and local officials responded to these demands by improving the area’s quality of education and infrastructure during the 1960s, which resulted in benefits for all members of the community.53

The elementary and public schools in the Clear Lake area were also affected by the NASA Center because the children of MSC employees and contractors added to the schools’ population.54 During the 1950s school growth in the Clear Lake area ranged from 90 to 100 additional students each year. However, school growth since the 1960s represented an average increase of 1,021 pupils a year.55

During the early 1960s the Clear Creek Independent School District, which was a consolidation of four school districts from the neighboring communities of Webster, Seabrook, Kemah, and League City, also faced a boom in its enrollment resulting from an influx of NASA families to the region. In the fall of 1961 the school district consisted of six schools and had a student population of 1,777 pupils. Within two years the Clear Creek School Board reported a 77 percent rise in its student enrollment. With the school district forced to accommodate an additional 1,046 students, the school board approved the construction of additional buildings and facilities to alleviate the tremendous growth problems, including an immediate four–classroom addition to the Webster Elementary School and a five–classroom addition to the Clear Creek Junior High School.56

52. “NASA’s Prime Contractors & Prime Contract Awards as of December 31, 1967,” 31 December 1967, Robert C. Eckhardt Papers, Box 95-147/195, Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin, Austin, TX.
53. “For the Benefit of All Mankind,” 14 September 1970, Box 95-147/195, Robert C. Eckhardt Papers, Center for American History, Austin, TX.
As children from families working at the NASA site and space-oriented industries in the area continued to overcrowd the Clear Creek Independent School District, the school board applied for federal aid to build additional campuses and expand existing facilities.\(^5^7\) In January 1965 the U.S. Office of Education awarded the school district a $185,000 grant to construct a new high school campus in League City. The funds were received under a law that grants aid to school districts affected by nearby government installations.\(^5^8\) During the next three years the school district used bond funds and federal grants to support the construction of three new elementary schools in El Lago, Clear Lake City, and League City, and a junior high school in Seabrook.\(^5^9\) As the Clear Creek Independent School District expanded to 10 schools and 8,627 pupils in less than five years, the district received $203,079 in federal funds to prepare for additional growth during the late 1960s.\(^6^0\)

From its inception, the MSC also developed a close relationship with the area’s school districts in an effort to heighten students’ interests in science and mathematics by disseminating knowledge about the space program to the local elementary and secondary schools.\(^6^1\) In 1964, Houston Independent School District teachers Erine Baker and Grant Morrison cooperated with Public Relations Specialist Eugene E. Horton, who served as the chief of the educational programs at the MSC, to develop materials designed to inform teachers and students about the Agency’s current activities. By 1966, the Houston Independent School District supplied elementary and secondary teachers throughout Texas with educational aids, including film clips, workbooks, and pictures related to the space program. The Houston Independent School District–NASA program demonstrated that educators could effectively work with highly technical information and design materials for classroom instruction. Additionally, the program established a permanent flow of information between Texas schools and the MSC.\(^6^2\)

The location of the MSC in Houston also changed Texas’s image because of the increased space research conducted in the state. As a result, Houstonians were accorded a worldwide identity as “Space City, U.S.A.” during the 1960s. Local company owners willingly accepted their new Space Age image by changing the names of their establishments to demonstrate their pride in the space program.

57. The Houston Chronicle, 17 November 1964.
58. The Houston Chronicle, 6 January 1965.
Businesses such as the Space City Bar-B-Q Restaurant, Apollo Broadcasting Company, Space Age Laminating Company, Apollo Paint Company, Astro Nut Company, Space City Hearing Aids Company, Astro Baby Sitters Agency, and the Apollo Restaurant and Lounge surrounded the NASA Center in the Clear Lake area. And naturally the space burger, which most Houstonians claimed “tasted out-of-this-world,” was served at the Apollo Restaurant and Lounge.63

Texas sports teams also adopted space-oriented names to pay tribute to the nation’s space pioneers. Despite the fact that many individuals believe the Houston Rockets basketball team was named after the launch vehicles that carried astronauts and satellites into space, the club was actually christened The Rockets when the organization was founded in San Diego, California, in 1967.64 However, the Houston Astros baseball team drew their club name from the astronauts.65 And in October 1965 Houston’s new professional ice hockey team was named the Apollos in honor of the lunar landing program.66

Local attractions in the Houston area also had Space Age names. For instance, Tranquility Park, which was a tribute to the Apollo 11 mission, was constructed in the city’s central business district. The enclosed multipurpose stadium where the Astros played was named the Astrodome, and adjacent to the sports complex was Astroworld, which was a recreational theme park that offered family entertainment.67

With Houston serving as the training center for America’s astronauts and as the control center for all human spaceflights, astronauts Michael Collins, Edwin E. “Buzz” Aldrin, Jr., and Neil A. Armstrong paid homage to the Lone Star State by flying a Texas flag aboard the command module during the Apollo 11 mission.68 This flight to the lunar surface was significant to Houstonians in another way because the first word spoken publicly by astronaut Neil Armstrong on the moon was the name of their city: “Houston . . . Tranquility Base here. The Eagle has landed.”69 In November 1969 astronaut Alan L. Bean, who was a Fort Worth native, also brought worldwide attention to the Lone Star State by carrying a Texas flag to the lunar

63. The Houston Post, 21 July 1969.


surface on the Apollo 12 mission.70 And although Apollo 16 astronauts Charles M. Duke, Jr., and John W. Young did not carry a Texas flag to the Moon, they did name one of the Moon’s craters “Lone Star” in honor of Texas.71

**Conclusion**

Although the Agency did not utilize the MSC as a site to launch rockets into space, the installation did launch southeast Texas into an orbit of growth and prosperity as the federal complex brought international attention to the region and made Houston the focal point of the Space Age fever that was spreading throughout the nation. The NASA facility also served as a catalyst to the state’s economy and stimulated enormous development projects in the Clear Lake area. Thousands of new jobs were created in Houston as a result of the relocation of national aerospace firms to the region. Not only did these companies cause a new wave of industrialization in Texas, they also assisted in the diversification of state’s economy. The Center also enhanced the prestige and stature of the area’s academic institutions. More importantly, the federal complex contributed to the desegregation of Rice University, which recognized that it was necessary for a nationally competitive school to be racially integrated. As NASA placed Texas into orbit, the state entered a new era of technological, scientific, and economic progress during the late twentieth century.72

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