

Some Columbus Day Thoughts About Elon Musk

By Glenn Harlan Reynolds

Elon Musk has scored multiple triumphs. The left has responded by sniping. But it does seem like the successful enterprises in America are increasingly run by non-leftists.

It's ironic, of course, because the space program started out as a project of the Democratic left. Republican Dwight Eisenhower was deeply skeptical of civilian space, seeing it as a boondoggle, and only after Sputnik did he yield to popular pressure and get the ball rolling.



It was Democrat JFK who kicked off the moon race. I spoke years ago to Kennedy's science adviser, Jerome Wiesner, when Wiesner was president of MIT and I was writing a book on space. Wiesner told me that Kennedy was very deliberately looking for a way to divert Cold War energies into something peaceful and productive. Kennedy was not so much a true believer in the von Braun space colonization vision as a user of that vision, but von Braun was smart enough not to complain.

Kennedy's successor LBJ was also a big space booster, in part because space pumped money into Texas, and partly because, more than the New Englander Kennedy, Johnson the Texan felt that the idea of space as an actual new frontier, not just a

piece of New Frontiers symbology, made sense.

It was Republican President Nixon, meanwhile, who though presiding over the Moon landing, saw to the unwinding of Apollo. Several planned missions were cancelled, along with the Apollo Applications project that would have given us a real space station – much bigger than Skylab – and plans for a manned mission to Mars. (When Nixon put Spiro Agnew in charge of the Mars mission planning, it was akin to Biden making Kamala border czar, proof that he wasn't serious.)

But the New Left *hated* Apollo. There were several reasons. First, the New Left was largely a revolt against the Old Left – they hated LBJ from early on, and the other old-style Democratic liberals like Hubert Humphrey. They were delighted to cost LBJ reelection, though less so with the results.

Second, Apollo was, as Norman Mailer wrote in *A Fire on the Moon*, the “triumph of the squares.” While all the long-haired countercultural types talked about changing the world with music, tie-dye, and psychedelics, a bunch of crew-cutted engineers in their short-sleeve dress shirts, pocket protectors, and skinny ties actually went and *did* it. They weren't “cool,” but they did something that had never been done before, and that had scarcely even been imagined.

This was unforgivable, and NASA had to be neutered, and was.

Worse yet, a space program was expansionary. If Western Civilization in general, and the United States of America in particular, was evil, then anything that led to the expansion of either must be evil too. The only acceptable product of the Apollo program was the photo of Earth from the Moon, an inward-looking image used to justify environmental programs that, along the lines of the Club Of Rome, were aimed at shrinking civilizational horizons, not expanding them.

(This is also the reason for all the hate aimed at Columbus. His sin wasn't anything that happened to the “indigenous”

peoples of the Americas. It was that his voyages led to the expansion – quite possibly the survival – of Western Civilization, and the eventual creation of the United States of America. In traditional United States usage, Columbus was a hero because he made the United States of America possible. To the left, that made him a villain of the first order.)

So of course they hate Elon Musk, who's doing the same kind of thing, and who has the poor taste to explain it and boast about it. Like most immigrants, he doesn't buy the left's revisionist picture of America as an awful thing (anyone who did wouldn't immigrate, after all). He sees America as something more like Ronald Reagan's shining city on a hill. And, even more intolerably, he doesn't even give lip service, or a modicum of respect, to the left's complaints. He mostly ignores them, and occasionally slaps them down with casual contempt.

This is, of course, precisely the correct response.

Also, Musk favors expanding horizons – economically, technologically, and geographically (cosmographically?) as humanity expands through the immense resources of the solar system. This, too, is anathema to the left, since socialism is always about dividing up poverty, never actually about sharing wealth. Churchill called it the equal sharing of misery, but that was actually overly kind – misery in socialist countries is never shared equally. The folks on top always do just fine.

You couldn't easily sell socialism in America when people could set off for the frontier, and you won't be able to sell it when people can set off for Mars, the Moon, or the asteroid belt. Or even get steadily richer on the product of those who do.

And worse still, socialist politicians and their – to borrow a phrase from the lefty lexicon – “running dogs” of academia,

the media, NGOs, etc., are jealous of people who expand horizons, because at heart they're small people with small minds. Large horizons make them feel small and inferior. They thrive in committee meetings where they get to feel big by deciding the fates of lesser beings. Elon has little to offer them.

And neither did Columbus, and that's why they're both hated by the inferior humans who are sniping and carping at them now. The left wants you to live in a small, poor world where sorry lefty tyrants are on top. Don't let that happen.

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