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Matthew H. Hersch

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Who were the men who led America's first voyages into space? Soldiers? Daredevils? The American public sometimes imagined them that way: dutiful military men or hot-shot pilots without the capacity for doubt, fear, or worry. The astronauts often portrayed themselves in this way, too, but image seldom matched reality. Instead, the early astronauts were something else entirely: a new kind of 'organization man,' calm, calculating, and attuned to the politics and celebrity of the Space Race. Many of the astronauts would have been just as successful in Corporate America, and until the first rockets carried humans into space, some seemed to be heading there. Instead, they strapped themselves to missiles and blasted themselves skyward, returning with a smile and an inspiring word for the press.

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