

INST 154
Apollo at 50
Discussion Questions
Session 3: NASA Before Apollo

NASA was created to do something completely new. Here we'll discuss some important aspects of how it was created.

1. The American political system is designed to resist change. Changing the law requires that the President, the House and the Senate all agree. In 1958, the country had a Republican President, a Democratic Senate (with a very slim majority), and a Democratic House of Representatives. How was it that the government acted so quickly and decisively to create NASA?
2. NASA was built out of the former National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics. Was this a good idea? What were the advantages of this? What were the disadvantages?
3. NASA had originally considered hiring mountain climbers, submariners, and daredevils as astronauts, but President Eisenhower decided to select only military test pilots. Was this a good idea? What would have been different if NASA had gone with their original proposal?