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OPINION

Liberty Will Be Necessary for Us to Settle in Space



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According to Walter Isaacson's biography of Elon Musk, in the early 2000s, after selling the company PayPal, Musk was sitting with some of the company's alumni in Las Vegas and one of them asked him what he was planning to do next. Musk answered: "I'm going to colonize Mars. My mission in life is to make mankind a multiplanetary civilization." His former colleague's reaction? "Dude, you're bananas."

True, Musk hasn't been to Mars yet. But he has built the most successful private space company with rockets that are far superior and much cheaper than anything ever built by government space agencies.

Elon Musk met the renowned aerospace engineer Robert Zubrin, founder of the Mars Society, at a dinner in 2001. Five years earlier, Zubrin had gained widespread recognition for his groundbreaking book *The Case for Mars: The Plan to Settle the Red Planet And Why We Must*. Inspired by Zubrin's vision and passion for Mars exploration, Musk founded SpaceX just six months after their meeting, with the primary objective of taking humans to the Red Planet.

While there had been a long period of stagnation in state-funded manned space travel after the moon landing and the cost of a space launch had remained static for 40 years, thanks to the introduction of mostly reusable launch vehicles Elon Musk's company, SpaceX, had managed to cut launch costs by a factor of five over the past decade. The conquest of Mars has become more realistic.

Nearly thirty years after the release of his first Mars book, Robert Zubrin has recently published a new book (*The New World on Mars: What We Can Create On the Red Planet*), which excels in presenting the economic basis for the colonization of Mars. Zubrin's medium term objective is to establish a settlement of 50,000 individuals on Mars. This goal, while ambitious, pales in comparison to Elon Musk's grand vision, which envisions sending 1,000 starships, each carrying 100 passengers, to Mars every year for ten years to establish a thriving community of one million people on the red planet.

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Thanks to the evaluation of numerous unmanned Mars missions, we now know that Mars is endowed with all the resources needed to support not only life but also the development of a technological civilization. There is plenty of water on the planet, albeit in frozen form. Mars also holds vast quantities of carbon, nitrogen, hydrogen, and oxygen, all in forms readily accessible to those clever enough to use them. But how could a mission to conquer Mars be financed?

According to Zubrin, the initial stages of Mars colonization would likely be funded by the government, but the involvement of private investors would then be essential moving forward. The harsh conditions and limited workforce on Mars, he explains, would require the settlers to be highly innovative, developing new inventions and patents to establish a

sustainable economy. This would, Zubrin writes, require advancements in technologies such as genetic engineering at a much faster pace than on Earth to guarantee a stable food supply. “The best, early, large-scale source of cash income that Mars colonists can generate will come from the sale and licensing of intellectual property.” Later, he continues, they would open up additional revenue streams, such as real estate, tourism, luxury goods, spectator sports, material exports, and asteroid mining, which, from a logistical point of view, is about 100 times easier to support from Mars than from Earth.

Zubrin is convinced that both the conquest of Mars and its subsequent colonization can only be financed under capitalism. “Liberty will be necessary for us to settle space. We will need to create ever cheaper and more cost-effective launch systems, spacecraft, and space transportation systems, and these require liberty.” However, economic freedom is not only important for sending rockets to Mars, but even more important for its colonization, Zubrin argues, because only maximum economic freedom can foster conditions to promote inventiveness and entrepreneurship, and only this will create the necessary foundations for the economic sustainability of a society on Mars.

Zubrin is optimistic that Mars, much like America in the past, will appeal to freedom-loving, energetic people. After all, without the promise of freedom, the society that emerges on Mars would never be able to attract enough people willing to take the risks and endure the hardships required to colonize the Red Planet.

Rainer Zitelmann is a historian and sociologist and the author of the books [The Power of Capitalism](https://the-power-of-capitalism.com/) and [How Nations Escape Poverty](https://nations-escape-poverty.com/)