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## We Need To Start Exploring Our Own Ocean

Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Alekseyevich was the first man to travel in space on April 12, 1961. Since then, hundreds of people have explored past the earth's atmosphere. Many discoveries and advancements have been made since then. Health and medical fields have benefitted from groundbreaking technology. We now have soil samples and extensive information on Mars, a spacecraft successfully landed on a comet for the first time in 2014, and black holes have been proven to exist. Everyday NASA is working on ways to uncover new information and build on the wealth of knowledge they've already accumulated. While there is no doubt that we gain from these amazing discoveries, we need to shift our attention and focus on our own planet. More effort needs to be placed on what is vital for the future of humanity and that is exploring the ocean and working towards its conservation.

It is widely known that some space exploration research is dedicated towards seeking resources such as mineral deposits. Raw materials mined from asteroids have been brought back to Earth for research. However, we could be doing the same thing by examining our ocean floor. The ocean offers a plethora of minerals that have yet to be found. While it is disconcerting that deep-sea mining could possibly interfere with the ecosystem, this could be an opportunity for the mining industry to update its technologies and search for a clean mining option.

Many ocean explorer's, such as Robert Ballard, understand the importance of educating ourselves with what lies beneath. When searching for why there was a mountain under tension in the Galapagos Rift, his crew stumbled upon something quite fascinating. "What you're looking at is an incredible pipe organ of chemicals coming out of the ocean. Everything you see in this picture is commercial grade: copper, lead, silver, zinc and gold." He goes to explain that the heat exiting the chimney's were 650 degrees Fahrenheit which is hot enough to melt lead. On the same expedition, he found clams which have never appeared in any text book he's studied. They didn't have a digestive system and looked nothing like the clams we are familiar with. In fact, there are countless creatures in the ocean that we have no knowledge of.

Rachel Carson was similar to Ballard in that she found the ocean and it's occupants to be captivating. Her piece "Undersea" was inspired by the wonders of the ocean and takes you on a remarkable tour underwater. "Every marine animal, from the smallest to the sharks and whales is ultimately dependent for its food upon these microscopic entities of the vegetable life of the ocean." Not only did she understand that the ocean was filled with beautiful creatures of different shapes and sizes, she was aware of how all inhabitants of the ocean are interconnected. The ocean sustains life on Earth. Therefore, we are connected to it as well. Unfortunately, human beings have caused so much damage due to pollution. An example of

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this are dead zones which are low-oxygen areas which create an extremely hostile environment for marine life. According to the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center, the number of dead zones have quadrupled since the 1950's. As the world continues to warm, oxygen levels will continue to drop. As difficult as it is to accept, there is a chain of events currently taking place. The ocean is a key element for human existence and when our ocean suffers, we suffer along with it.

Our climate is changing and more needs to be done because the future of our planet is on the line. There is no reversing the effects that have been made but humans can take preventative measures to prevent it from getting worse. Global warming has shown its effects with retreating glaciers, rising sea levels, and extreme weather. In fact, we know a lot of this to be true due to the data collected from NASA's own satellite imaging. While NASA has provided an abundance of useful tools and research for many years, we need to understand the importance of prioritizing our spending on exploration. NASA's annual budget would fund NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) for thousands of years (Carson).

Over 70% of Earth's planet surface is covered by the ocean and only 5% of it has been explored. It is the producer of half of the world's oxygen, provides humans with food, and regulates climate. While NASA's contributions are undoubtedly beneficial there are still no viable solutions to climate change in space. We need to start exploring our own ocean because similar to space, there is an endless amount of discoveries yet to be found and most importantly because there is an urgent need for change.

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