

-  **Trashing the JFK Legend in Germany**
- Why Kids Shouldn't Have Smartphones**
- Bring Back Social Studies**
- A Brief History of Ecstasy**

POLITICS | BUSINESS | TECH | ENTERTAINMENT | HEALTH | EDUCATION | SEXES | NATIONAL | GLOBAL | CHINA | VIDEO | MAGAZINE

Special Reports | In Focus | Events | E-books | Newsletters | Of Course the Booker Prize Should Get More Inclusive—Because English Has *Sophie Hardach*

Is There Life on Mars? No

Sorry, David Bowie.

MEGAN GARBER | SEP 19 2013, 3:35 PM ET

- 126
- Like
- 72
- Tweet
- 6
- 1
- Share



Barren. (NASA/JPL)

In 1971, David Bowie asked a question that had also been pondered by decades' worth of scientists and pseudo-scientists and regular old dreamers who gazed up into the sky and wondered who, and might, be up there. "Is there life on Mars?"

VIDEO



Are the Rich Getting Too Much of the Economic Pie?
Inequality explained in pie charts (made of actual pie)

WRITERS

James Fallows

If You Thought a Profitable Newspaper Was Surprising, How About This: A Pleasant Airport 2:35 PM ET

Derek Thompson

Apple's Record-Breaking Weekend Also Revealed Its Fundamental Conundrum 1:56 PM ET

Rebecca J. Rosen

Are Your Gmails Not Sending? 1:44 PM ET

Megan Garber

49% of the Links Cited in Supreme Court Decisions Are Broken 1:31 PM ET

James Hamblin

The Power of Sugar 1:27 PM ET

Jordan Weissmann

'Continued Existence of Cows Disproves Central Tenets of Capitalism?' 10:55 AM ET

Julie Beck

Study: Parents Care How Much a Daughter's Boyfriend Makes 9:05 AM ET

Ta-Nehisi Coates

The Killing of Jonathan Ferrell 8:35 AM ET

Today, we have an answer. And it's one that will -- if you are one of those dreamers who wanted the answer to be yes -- come as a crushing disappointment. The answer is ... no.

Or, well, the answer is *probably most definitely not*. And that's because Mars, it seems, [has no methane](#). Or, at least, the Curiosity rover that's been tooling around the surface of the Red Planet for more than a year, taking measurements of the air and the soil, has found no methane. And that means, essentially, that life as we know it does not -- cannot -- exist on the planet. Methane is the byproduct of microbial respiration; no methane, basically, no microbes. "It just isn't there," Dr. Sushil K. Atreya, a member of Curiosity's science team, [told *The New York Times*](#).

John Grotzinger, the project scientist for the Curiosity mission, [conceded](#) that the findings do "diminish the argument that there are methanogenic organisms there." The news "discounts," he said -- though it doesn't fully refute -- the idea that there could be life on Mars. It's a big planet.

A paper published today in the journal *Science* [broke the news](#). And it offers a seeming refutation of an earlier finding: A decade ago, telescopes detected what seemed to be plumes of methane rising from certain regions of Mars -- which gave rise to speculation about life on the Red Planet. With today's findings, though, the idea of life on Mars -- life happening now, in the nooks and crannies of our neighbor planet -- has been returned to a question of speculation.

Which is disappointing for the many scientists who invested so much into answering the life-on-Mars question -- and to the many non-scientists who prefer to think of Earth as unexceptional. But today's news is also, of course, a reminder of how interplanetary science works. When your laboratory is another planet, discovery is adventurous, and expensive, and occasionally disappointing. You strive and strive and search and search, and sometimes you don't find the thing you were looking for. Sometimes, the thing you were looking for turns out not to be a thing at all.

More in Technology



What Did the Continents Look Like Millions of Years Ago?

GEOFF MANAUGH &

NICOLA TWILLEY



Stephen Colbert: Comedian, Emmy Winner, Fitness Trainer to Astronauts

MEGAN GARBER



The Time a Cleveland Newspaper Divulged the Manhattan Project

REBECCA J. ROSEN



Oktoberfest 2013

Most Popular

- 1 I Quit Teach for America
- 2 My Daughter's Homework Is Killing Me
- 3 What Did the Continents Look Like Millions of Years Ago?
- 4 How the NFL Fleeces Taxpayers
- 5 *Breaking Bad*: Is Heisenberg Alive? Is Walter White?
- 6 Oktoberfest 2013
- 7 The Case Against High-School Sports