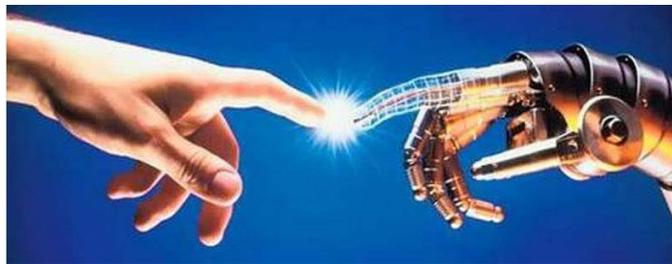


1970: Looking Back on a Half Century

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When did the 60s end? Some look to 1968, with the assassinations of MLK and RFK, the Tet Offensive showing the war was unwinnable, and riots from Chicago to Paris contributing to the election of Richard Nixon as the voice for the “silent majority.” Others look to the fall of Saigon, Watergate, and the “me generation” in the mid-70s as the end of the era when changing the world still seemed possible. 1970 saw the continuation of the antiwar, environmental, and women’s movements, and the rise of the conservative wave that would roll back civil rights and other 60s reforms.

We will look back to 1970 as a pivotal year for reflecting upon the technological innovations, economic trends, and social changes that have shaped our consciousness and lifeways. The 1970s brought the origins of the personal computer and the internet, the emergence of ecological and global ways of thinking, polymorphous identities, and the emergence of the New Right. In the 70s we saw affirmative action redefined as reverse discrimination, and we watched as stagflation and deindustrialization undercut working people and major cities. These trends contributed to the converging racial animosities, economic insecurities, and cultural dislocations of our times.



For the history of these developments, we will rely on Thomas Borstelmann’s [The 1970s: A Global History from Civil Rights to Income Inequality](#), 2012. Readings on the weekly topics will be made available online.

Weekly Schedule

April 16: How We Think Now will consider the impact of 1970s technological innovations, including the floppy disk, dynamic access memory chip, ethernet, cellular phone, and personal computer. These inventions launched the “third industrial revolution” (with the first shaped by steam engines, the second by electricity, and the fourth by the contemporary convergence of AI, automation, global integrations, bioengineering, etc.). The dizzying array of social, economic, and global changes in the 1970s are surveyed by Borstelmann. Those changes left people overwhelmed by “future shock,” as we discussed in our first class. In this class, we will use the works of Marshall McLuhan to assess the two communication revolutions that have shaped our lives: the transition from print to television and the cascading impact of the personal computer and internet. McLuhan foresaw how electronic “media ecologies” would create the experience of living in a “global village.” New Journalists such as Tom Wolfe competed with visual media by writing in a sensationalistic style that captured and critiqued the pop sensibility of the “Me Generation.”

Readings:

- Borstelmann, *1970s*, “Crosscurrents of Crisis” (pages 19-72)
- Digital and Electronic Revolution timeline (2nd class readings)
- “How books irrevocably changed culture,” Mike Colagrossi
- Marshall McLuhan, excerpts
- Tom Wolfe, “The ‘Me’ Decade and the Third Great Awakening” (excerpts)



Recommended: We will discuss how Doug Englehardt used his famous [Mother of All Demos](#) in 1968 to demonstrate a computer mouse, a prototype of the internet, a graphic interface, and the sort of [innovations that would become Google and Wikipedia](#). You may also be interested in this [short documentary on McLuhan](#) narrated by Wolfe, who also wrote [“What if he is right?”](#) (1965). The documentary opens with the segment from *Annie Hall* (1977) that features McLuhan.



[“The Cockettes,”](#) 1970.

April 23: Sexual Politics will begin by considering the works from 1970 that popularized the slogan that “sisterhood is powerful.” We will discuss how the women’s movement sought to raise our collective consciousness. We will take note of other 1970 works such as Kate Millett’s *Sexual Politics* and *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, which arose from [feminist consciousness-raising groups](#) that used the self-help course [Women and Their Bodies](#). These efforts set the stage for the first gay pride marches in 1970 that LGBTQ people organized to make their presence known. We will consider the impact of the “gay liberation” by referencing *Time* magazine cover articles from 1969 and 1979, and we will also discuss the challenges to 2nd wave feminism posed by black feminists.

Readings:

- Borstelmann, *1970s*, “The Rising Tide of Equality and Democratic Reform” (pages 76-121)
- “Sisterhood is Powerful,” Susan Brownmiller, *New York Times*, 1970 (4th week readings packet)
- *Redstockings Manifesto*, 1969.
- *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, Preface to 1973 edition.
- “A Glimpse into 1970s Gay Activism,” Rebecca Rosen, *The Atlantic*, 2014.
- “The Homosexual in America,” *Time*, 1969.
- “How Gay is Gay? Homosexual men and women are making progress toward equality,” *Time*, 1979.
- *A Black Feminist Statement*, 1977.

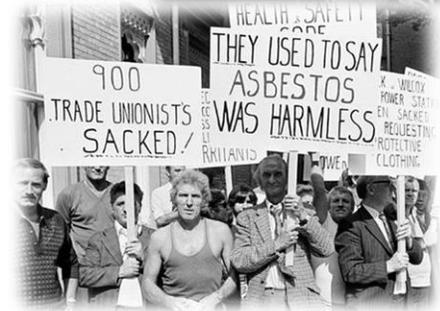
Recommended: CNN’s *The Seventies* documentary series includes [“Feminism Makes Waves,”](#) which provides online interviews and other video and photographic records of the women’s movement. The [second chapter](#) of Kate Millett’s *Sexual Politics* is available on line. Also useful is this [review of the emergence of black feminism in the 70s](#).

April 30: The Changing Face of America will review the demographic shifts that were part of deindustrialization. The 70s saw the reverse migration of African Americans from the North back to the South. High-paying working-class jobs declined as companies moved from the Rust Belt to the “Sun Belt” (a term coined in 1969). At the same time, the middle-classes moved to the suburbs and to the South. These migrations and dislocations were exacerbated by the income inequalities that have expanded as labor-saving devices have replaced the labor of working people.

While we have relied on Borselmann’s account of the 70s largely for background in previous classes, we will engage more fully in this class with his assessments of stagflation and other 70s economic trends. To put a human face on those trends, we will look to Cowie’s *Stayin’ Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class*, and to pick up the beat, we will consider what “Stayin’ Alive” in the Disco Era represented. These discussions will help us reflect on how our lives have been shaped by our dislocations as snowbirds, suburbanites, and upwardly mobile people who have become displaced from the ways we lived and worked in the 1970s.

Readings:

- Borstelmann, *1970s*, “The Spread of Market Values” (pages 122-174)
- “Deindustrialization and the Rise of the Sunbelt” (4th class reading packet)
- [African-American Migration](#) (online interactive overview)
- *Stayin’ Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class*, “Something’s Happening to People Like Me,” Jefferson Cowie (4th class reading packet)



Recommended: On the impact of 70s stagflation on Americans' sense of self, see [“The Real Legacy of the 70s.”](#) For more information on other dislocations in the 70s, see this Brookings Institute Report: [The New Great Migration: Black Americans Return to the South](#) and MacGillis' [Atlantic review](#) of Isenberg's [White Trash: The 400-Year Untold History of Class in America](#) and Vance's [Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis](#), which became popular after the angers and frustrations of working people played out in the 2016 election, as we will continue to discuss in the next class.

May 7: What were the lessons of Viet Nam?

We will continue our explorations of the historical dynamics of globalism and tribalism. We remind ourselves of how television brought the global village into our living rooms and how distrust of the government and the turn against the war contributed to the deepening divisions in American society. With Bortelson's overview of the decline of traditional empires as our point of departure, we will examine how Americans lost faith in America. As in prior classes, we will not spend much time discussing the war or the antiwar movements. We will consider how events of 1970 set later developments in motion by fostering militancy on the right and left and distancing less-educated communities from the cosmopolitan trends of the time.

Readings:

- Borstelmann, *1970s*, “The Retreat of Empires and the Global Advance of the Market” (175-226, 22-36, 45-53)
- Vietnam War Timeline (5th class packet of readings)
- “Vietnam: The War that Killed Trust,” Karl Mariantes, *NYT*, 2018
- ““There Was All This Chaos’: Vietnam-Era Activists Reflect,” 2015
- *The Making of a Counter Culture*, Theodore Roszak, 1968 (excerpts)

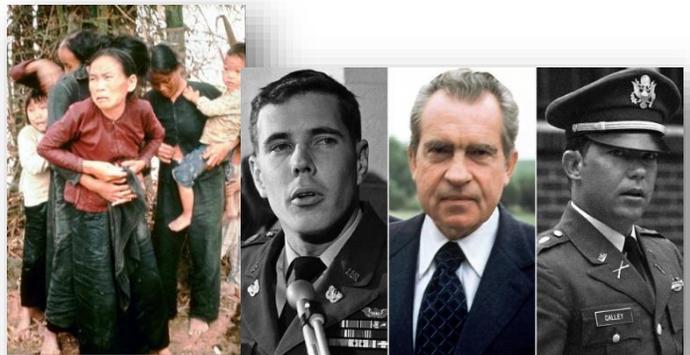
Recommended: [Ken Burns' Vietnam documentary](#) is available on YouTube, and the [National Archives Vietnam exhibit](#) provides short documentary clips of key aspects of the war. This [short documentary](#) reviews television coverage of the shootings at Kent State and the antiwar movement in 1970. You can read about [the New York Time's “race” to publish](#) the *Pentagon Papers* and also [find them online](#). For how the *Pentagon Papers* got written, see [“The Day the Presses Stopped: A History of the Pentagon Papers Case”](#) (1996). On the historical dynamics of populism, liberalism, and conservatism, see George Nash's “American Conservatism & the Problem of Populism” from the *New Criterion*. One of the best-known accounts of the late 60s drug culture is Tom Wolfe's account of Ken Kesey's traveling roadshow in [The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test](#) (1968). YouTube has many [antiwar music videos](#) such as this [sequence from Apocalypse Now](#) (1979) with the Doors' “This is the End and McGuire's “[Eve of Destruction](#)” and CSNY's [“4 Dead in Ohio.”](#)



Senator Ted Kennedy and John Kerry at [Winter Soldier Hearings](#), 1971



[Pulitzer-prize winning student photo](#) of Mary Ann Vecchio kneeling over Jeffrey Miller, shot by National Guard troops at Kent State in 1970



My Lai Massacre, 1969 and [Nixon and the Coverup](#), 1970



[“The Blue Marble”](#) Apollo Photo, 1972

May 14: Can we evolve fast enough to avoid extinction?

We will conclude by considering how well our generation has answered it. How much progress have we made with climate change since the first Earth Day in 1970? We’ve become more health conscious; we recycle, we drive fuel efficient cars, but how much difference does that really make? As in previous classes, we will use 1970 as our benchmark for consider these questions. That year President Nixon signed the National Environmental Policy Act requiring an EPA Statement for all "major federal actions significantly affecting the quality of the human environment." A sense of urgency had been in the air from the launch of the environmental movement with Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* in 1962 through works such as Paul Ehrenreich’s *Population Bomb* in 1968. To aid our memories, we will consider the 1970 publication of the *Greening of America* and a couple poems and essays by Gary Snyder, a promoter of what became known as “deep ecology.” That frame will help us bring together our discussions of

futurism, media ecologies, systems thinking, global consciousness, and connected ways of knowing. We will take note of how environmentalism is viewed by the generations who have come of age in a world that is witnessing the crises that were first projected in the 70s. Some of those projections were dead wrong, but the threats remain, and we need to think about what we have done and can do about them.

Readings:

- Borstelmann, “Resistance to the New Hyper-Individualism” (pages 227-78)
- “Paul Ehrlich: ‘Collapse of civilization is a near certainty within decades,’” 2018 (excerpts in 6th week in packet along with the others listed below)
- Charles Reich, *The Greening of America*, 1970 (chapter 1)
- Gary Snyder, “The Politics of Ethnopoetics,” “The Wildness,” & selected poems

Recommended: [This review](#) from 1971 provides an overview and a criticism that helps to explain why Reich’s call for a revolutionary break from the prevailing consciousness was widely read and never implemented. To close the loop with our opening discussion of futurism, you may wish to read Elke Seefield’s [“Globalized Science: the 1970s Futures Field,”](#) which examines how formal studies of the future were shaped by the convergence of global, ecological, and systems thinking in the 1970s in the US and Western Europe. While the article on Ehrlich provides evidence that the world is fast approaching environmental disaster, [this piece argues prosperity](#) has disproved doomsayers such as Ehrlich, and more [good news is available here on global trends](#). The [consensus on climate change has broken](#) down, while the [trends have accelerated](#). The [attitudes of younger generations](#) are one source of hope.

