1970: A Half Century of Change
Thomas Miller, tpm@arizona.edu
Department of English
Modern Languages Bldg. 365

When did the 60s end? Some look to 1968, when the assassinations of MLK and RFK ended hopes of electoral change, the Tet Offensive convinced most Americans the war was unwinnable, and riots from Chicago to Paris contributed to the election of Richard Nixon as the voice for the “silent majority.” Others look to the fall of Saigon, Watergate, and the emergence of the “me generation” in the mid-70s as the end of a revolutionary era when changing the world still seemed possible. 1970 saw the continuation of the antiwar, environmental, and women’s movements, but it also saw 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 launch of the personal computer and the internet, the emergence of ecological and global ways of thinking, the popularization of polymorphous identities, and the evolution of New Left politics. In the 70s we also saw affirmative action redefined as reverse discrimination, and we watched as stagflation and deindustrialization undercut working people and urban centers. These trends contributed to the converging racial animosities, economic insecurities, and cultural dislocations that are reshaping current politics.

We will consider these trends with these books from and about the 70s. While I have not finalized the readings, we will take note of these books:

➢ Germain Greer, Female Eunuch, 1970.
➢ Kate Millet, Sexual Politics, 1970.

Weekly Schedule

Week 1: Days of Future Past will focus on the futures that were imagined a generation ago. We will consider the broader history of futurism and discuss the most noted futurist work from 1970: Toffler’s Future Shock. Toffler popularized the idea that technological, cultural, and socioeconomic changes were moving at such a speed that human consciousness could not keep up. We will also take note of another benchmark book published in 1970: Foucault’s Archaeology of Knowledge, which followed upon his influential 1960s works, The Birth of the Clinic, Madness and Civilization, and The Order of Things. These works were foundational to what became known as postmodernism. Archaeology of Knowledge established the framework for assessing how epochal changes in the social construction of knowledge constitute distinctive ways of knowing, or episteme. Toffler’s and Foucault’s works will provide us with experiential, technological, and philosophical frameworks for reflecting upon the changes we have witnessed in our lifetimes.

Popular 1970 film on artificial intelligence
**Week 2: How We Think Now** will follow up on the first class to consider the impact of the 1970s origins of the floppy disk, dynamic access memory chip, ethernet, cellular phone, and personal computer. 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 convergence of the personal computer and internet. Even before the internet, McLuhan foresaw how digital “media ecologies” would create the “global village.”

**Week 3: Sexual Politics** will focus on 1970 works by Kate Millett and Germain Greer along with other 1970 works such as *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, which emerged out of the consciousness-raising groups that focused on a course on *Women and Their Bodies*. These groups promoted the embodied and connected ways of thinking that became characterized as “women’s ways of knowing.” These consciousness-raising efforts set the stage for the first gay pride marches in 1970 that GLBTQ people organized to make their presence known and claim their rights. These converging trends transformed prevailing social assumptions, not just about sexuality, but also about identity. Many liberals came to view personal identity as performative, rather than as inescapably innate or social conditioned.

**Week 4: The Changing Face of America** will review the demographic shifts that were part of deindustrialization. The 1960s and 70s saw the conclusion of the historic migration of African Americans from the rural south to urban cities in the north—and the beginning of the movement of industrial jobs from the Rust Belt to the “Sun Belt” (a term coined in 1969). At the same time, middle-class whites moved from urban centers to the suburbs. These migrations and cultural dislocations are part of the loss of good paying jobs for working people that shaped the intersections of race and class. These trends contributed to the expanding income inequalities and the populist politics of our times.

**Week 5: What Should We Have Learned from Viet Nam?** We will examine how America’s overreach and failure to learn multilateral thinking foreshadowed recent US military occupations. As in prior classes, we will not focus on the war or the antiwar movements in detail. We will use the events of 1970 as a point of reference for reflecting upon subsequent historical developments, particularly the ways that the war fostered radical antigovernment militancy on the right and left, while also deepening divisions between and within liberalism and conservativism. From the 1970s globalization and America’s role in the world became widening wedge issues. While the US developed multinational coalitions to go to war in Iraq and Afghanistan, those decisions showed we still have much to learn about globalization.

**Week 6: Can we evolve fast enough to avoid extinction?** In our concluding discussion, we will consider how little progress we have made with confronting climate change since the first Earth Day. We will also consider the publication of the *Greening of America* in 1970 to bring together our discussions of futurism, media ecologies, networked thinking, embodied ways of knowing, and global consciousness. We will consider how these trends have been experienced by the generations who have come of age in a world that is witnessing the environmental crises first projected in the 1970s.