

1968

Thomas Miller
Thursdays, 1-4:00
February 1st to 22nd

Preliminary Course Overview

We will examine the social movements that shaped the year that began with the Tet Offensive and ended with the first flight around the moon. Our first classes will examine the antiwar, civil rights, and women's movements using short readings to assess what the 60s came to represent. In our last class, we will reflect upon how the media have shaped our consciousness over the half century in which guerilla wars have continued to rage on the evening news, minorities and women have struggled to claim their rights, and the media have become so ever-present life that many of us need to be on line to feel connected.



We will use iconic images and texts to examine how social movements set out distinctive conceptual frameworks to mobilize people to advance their shared needs. The civil rights movement is the best-known example, but the sixties gave rise to new types of grassroots movements such as the women's movement and the environmental movement that were focused less on a specific political outcome such as desegregation and more on changing how people think and live. "The personal is political" was one slogan used to frame these "new social movements," and to report on what they represented. Such 60s catchphrases still resonate for many of us, in part because the changes in consciousness that came to the fore in 1968 were in tune with emerging historical trends such as globalization, the mediation of everyday life, the rising status of women and people of color, and the transition from an industrial to an information economy.

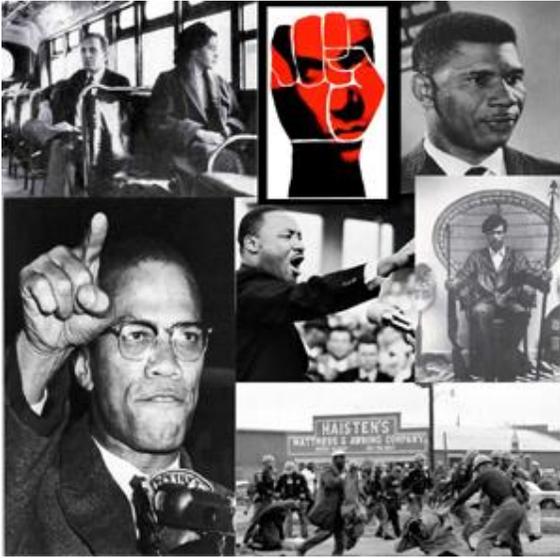


2/1 THE ANTIWAR MOVEMENT

Antiwar activism spiked following the Tet Offensive because it seemed to demonstrate that the government was lying about the prospects for victory. While supporters of the war viewed the defeat of the offensive as a victory, the images on the news seemed to tell a different story—a story that turned much darker with the reports of massacres at My Lai. Rather than sending the 200,000 additional troops that were requested, President Johnson announced he would not run for reelection, and the Paris Peace talks began—all within the first six months of 1968.

While Viet Nam is commonly viewed as the first television war, we will approach the antiwar movement through the rise of the "New Journalism," which rejected presumptions of objectivity in favor of graphic realism and an edgy cynicism about the government that captured the spirit of 1968. Following the election of Richard Nixon, antigovernment animosities rose to levels that remained unsurpassed until our own time. We will examine how such oppositions were framed by activists and journalists to consider the diverging histories of the "silent majority" and the "counterculture." Those historical developments have left us with the populist resentments and "fake news" attacks on the "mainstream media" that have left many Americans feeling like strangers in a strange land—a feeling of estrangement that harkens back to the American experience in 1968.

2/8 THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT



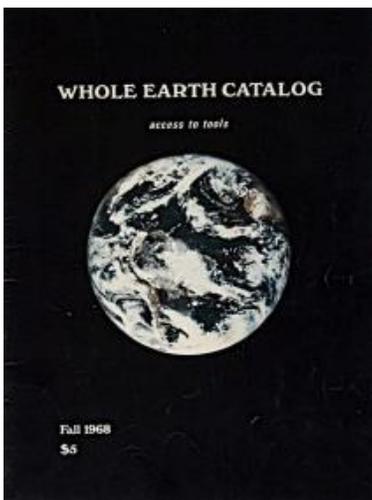
The civil rights movement provides a clear-cut example of a traditional social movement concerned with persuading people to act collectively to achieve shared objectives such as the Civil Rights Act of 1968. When the leading spokesman for nonviolent collective action was gunned down, riots burned across the country, and when the Democrat who had the best hope of bringing the country together was also murdered, the electoral process became overwhelmed by mobs seeking to shut down the Democratic Convention. Our point of departure for assessing the radicalization of the left in 1968 will be Martin Luther King's turn against the Vietnam War. As King came to criticize American imperialism, it became hard for him to offer unifying homages to American exceptionalism. In this class, we will consider 1968 as the sharpest turn to the left in American history and reflect upon how the radicalism of youth fades with time.

2/15 WOMEN'S LIB

We will examine the protest against the Miss America Pageant in 1968 as a generational moment in the history of the women's movement. Younger radical activists staged the demonstration to create a media event, while older feminists were concerned that sensationalist bra burnings would detract from efforts to advance women's rights. Radical feminists viewed patriarchy as the source of oppression, materialism, and imperialism, while older feminists tended to focus on advancing reforms such as claiming rights to birth control and expanding opportunities for women. We will use the differences in the generations' frames to reflect upon what gender was coming to represent in 1968.



2/22 THE MEDIUM IS THE MESSAGE



In our last class, we will use another iconic text from 1968 as a focal point for considering the conflicted legacies of the sixties, *The Whole Earth Catalogue*. It marketed an anti-consumerist ethos as a lifestyle, functioned as a sort of predecessor to the internet by helping people unplug and live off the grid, and popularized self-sufficiency and the interconnectedness of all things. We will use the *Catalogue* as a source text for considering how changes in human consciousness have been mediated in ways that can be traced back to 1968. The *Catalogue* richly documents how the medium becomes the message—a catchphrase coined by the leading 60s commentator on the media, Marshall McLuhan. McLuhan's theories will help us reflect upon how the countercultural consciousness of the 60s became a global phenomenon.