

The 1970s: The Lost Decade

An Online Professional Development Seminar



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from the National Humanities Center

FROM THE FORUM

- **Teaching Challenge:** The 1970s come at the end of the year. How to motivate students?
- **Question:** What aspect of the decade had the greatest long-term impact: domestic issues, international developments, cultural trends?

FROM THE FORUM

Characterizations

- **Disillusioned** because of a fall from innocence or idealism of the 1960s
- **Floundering** because the national government seemed to be uncertain of its role both nationally and internationally
- **Intoxicated** because people lost their way morally and emotionally and used various substances to numb themselves
- **Broken/fragile** because I remember the number of friends growing up whose parents divorced. Many of my peers felt somewhat orphaned by our parents as the "grown-ups" sort of left us to fend for ourselves while they did their own thing

FROM THE FORUM Characterizations

- **Transitional and transformative** because the period came between the very different 60s and 80s
- **Sobering** because of some important realizations about our system, our society, and our people
- **Exciting** because things were moving fast and the nation was seeing a lot of change on many levels and in many areas; because amazing technological changes were taking place right before our eyes; because of the excellent television programming, the 1976 Summer Olympics, and Star Wars.
- **Innocent** because we really didn't understand the consequences that would result from the things we did.

FROM THE FORUM Characterizations

- **Confusing** because we were struggling to find out who we were.
- **Flashy** because of disco, sexual freedom, big hair, big shoes, and bell bottoms
- **Liberating** because of women's roles in society

FROM THE FORUM Characterizations

- **Unconventional** because of TV sitcoms such as “All in the Family,” “Maude,” “Good Times,” “The Odd Couple,” “Three’s Company,” “The Jeffersons,” etc.
- **Sleazy** because of the macho guys with open shirts, bushy mustaches, and a plethora of gold chains around their necks looking for free love
- **Turbulent** because of the oil crisis, presidential crisis, and families in crisis



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*Convict Labor, Civic Welfare:
Prisons and Rehabilitation in mid-twentieth century America.*
(Oxford University Press, forthcoming)

Minds and Matters: Technology in California and the West.
(University of California Press, 2012)

“A Tale of Two Crises: A Comparative View of the
Political Economy of the 1920s and 2000s.” in
When Government Helped. (Oxford UP, forthcoming)

“When the Jungle Met the Forest:
Public Work and Civil Defense in California’s Prison Camps.”
http://www.journalofamericanhistory.org/teaching/2009_12/

The Great Depression and the New Deal. A Study Guide
(U.S. Academic Decathlon, 2009).

1. Identify the **major trends in American politics** – domestic and foreign - in the 1970s.
2. Explain the **transformation of the American economy** during the 1970s
3. Explore the way **social movements of the 1960s changed** and persisted throughout the 1970s.
4. Provide an analysis of the **origins of the conservative movement**.
5. Assess the **changes and continuities** between the **1960s** and the 1970s.
6. Assess the **changes and continuities** between the 1970s and **1980s**.

1. 1968
2. Nixon and Vietnam: The End to the Imperial Presidency?
3. The New Global Economy: From American Century to Stagflation
4. The Continued Struggle for Rights
5. The End of New Deal Liberalism and the Rise of the New Right
6. Reading the 1970s

Key Trends of the 1970s

- Americans and their **Government**: From Faith to Failure
- **Economy**: From American Century to Stagflation – to Globalization
- From **Civil Rights** to Affirmative Action to White Backlash
- From Pro-Growth **Liberalism** to Social and Economic **Conservatism**

1968 was the year in which both the domestic and foreign crises reached their apogee.

Tumult of 1968 shook American self-confidence



Police Riot outside the Democratic National Convention in Chicago,
August 1968

Tet offensive: North Vietnamese offensive
January 31, 1968
(Tet holiday)

My Lai Massacre: U.S. soldiers “berserk” against civilians

Public opinion turns

Taken by the late great Adams during the 1968 Tet offensive, it shows Nguyen Ngoc Loan, South Vietnam’s national police chief, shooting a prisoner who was said to be a Viet Cong captain.





Martin Luther King, Jr. assassinated April 4 Memphis

Robert Kennedy assassinated June 5 California

- public grief; sense of chaos, disorder

Chicago Democratic Party convention

Republican nominee Nixon

- “Peace with honor”

Nixon and Vietnam: The End to the Imperial Presidency?

Nixon, the Accidental Liberal

Great Society curtailment

- state control of Great Society programs
- environmental, worker, consumer protection legislation passed

Stagflation

- New Economic Policy
(based on liberal Democratic proposals)
- off gold standard
- helped unify global markets

Supreme Court

- new appointees gave no sharp reversals
- advanced women's rights
- abortion rights: *Roe v. Wade* 1973

A fierce cold warrior in his congressional career, Richard M. Nixon had the political capital that allowed him to improve relationships with China and the Soviet Union.



Nixon and Vietnam: The End to the Imperial Presidency?

Nixon and Kissinger Vietnam and Vietnamization

- reduced forces 1969-1973
- Invasion of Cambodia
- ceasefire 1973
- 1975 communist victory

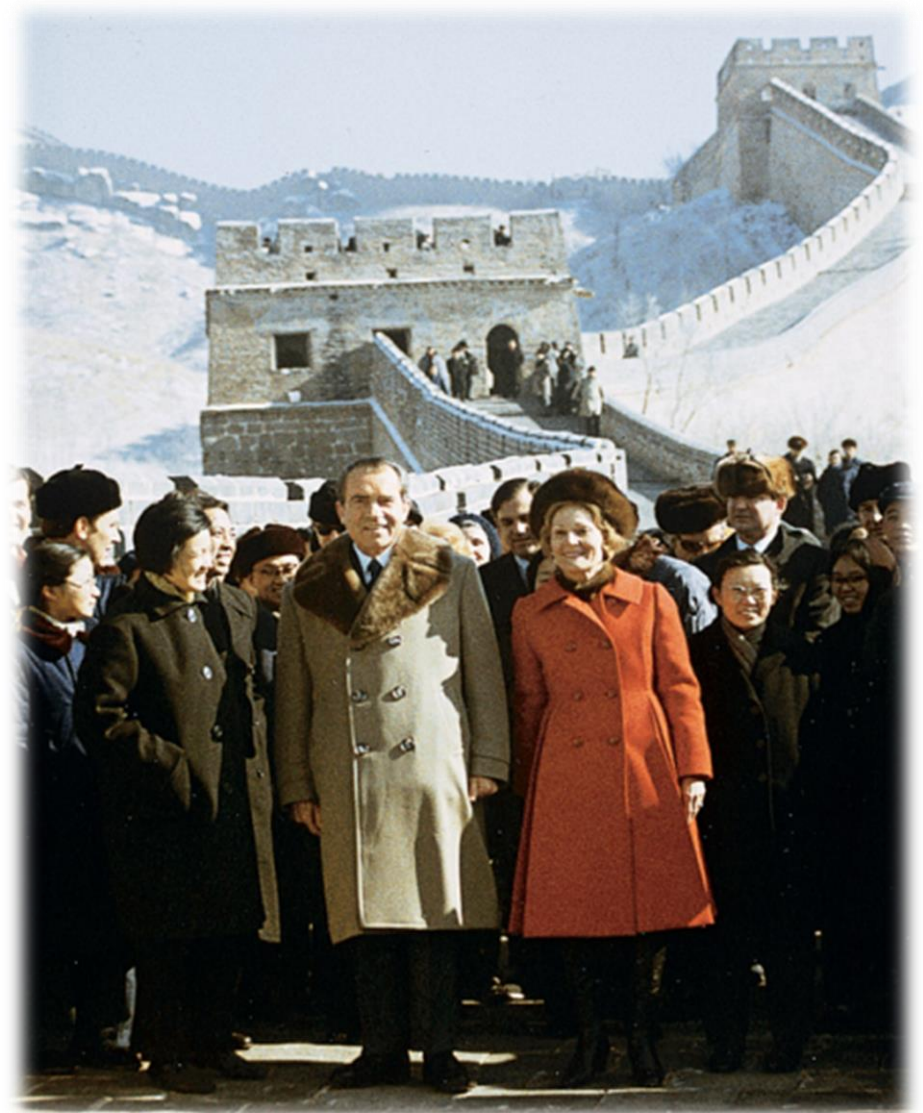
Détente

- calming Cold War with USSR

China

- secret negotiations, contempt for public reduced Nixon's support

How did Nixon's reputation as a hawkish conservative help him innovate in foreign policy?



Nixon and Vietnam: The End to the Imperial Presidency?

Watergate

Nixon paranoia

- operatives: “White House Plumbers”
- bugged Democratic National Committee headquarters
- caught

White House cover-up

- Woodward and Bernstein
- special independent prosecutor Archibald Cox
- televised Senate hearings

Nixon tapes

- Nixon fired Cox instead of handing over
- impeachment
- resignation

The Watergate scandal revealed not only President Nixon’s personality, but also the importance of Congress and the Supreme Court in preserving the constitution.

In this photo, Nixon and his family say goodbye to his successor, Gerald Ford, and Betty Ford, and prepare to board the helicopter that took them away for the last time.



The New Global Economy: From American Century to Stagflation

Middle East

Yom Kippur War

- Egypt, Syria attack Israel
- U.S. military equipment to Israel
- Kissinger's "shuttle diplomacy" to begin peace process
- not addressing Palestinian state issues
- Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)
- boycott oil sales to U.S., allies
- price increases
- recession, U.S. unemployment



After 20 prosperous years and high population growth, the U.S. had become vulnerable to its high gas consumption was high—85% of Americans drove their cars to work. "The basic fact is that the nation's appetite for fuel is enormous. America, with only 6 percent of the world's population, consumes 33 percent of its energy."

U.S. News & World Report, 2/19/ 1973

The New Global Economy: From American Century to Stagflation

The economic challenge of the future...

- Domestic Spending and War
- Soaring unemployment and price inflation end 20 years of prosperity

And the economic policies of the past...

- 90-day wages & price freeze
- Abandoned gold-to-dollar ratio in 1971

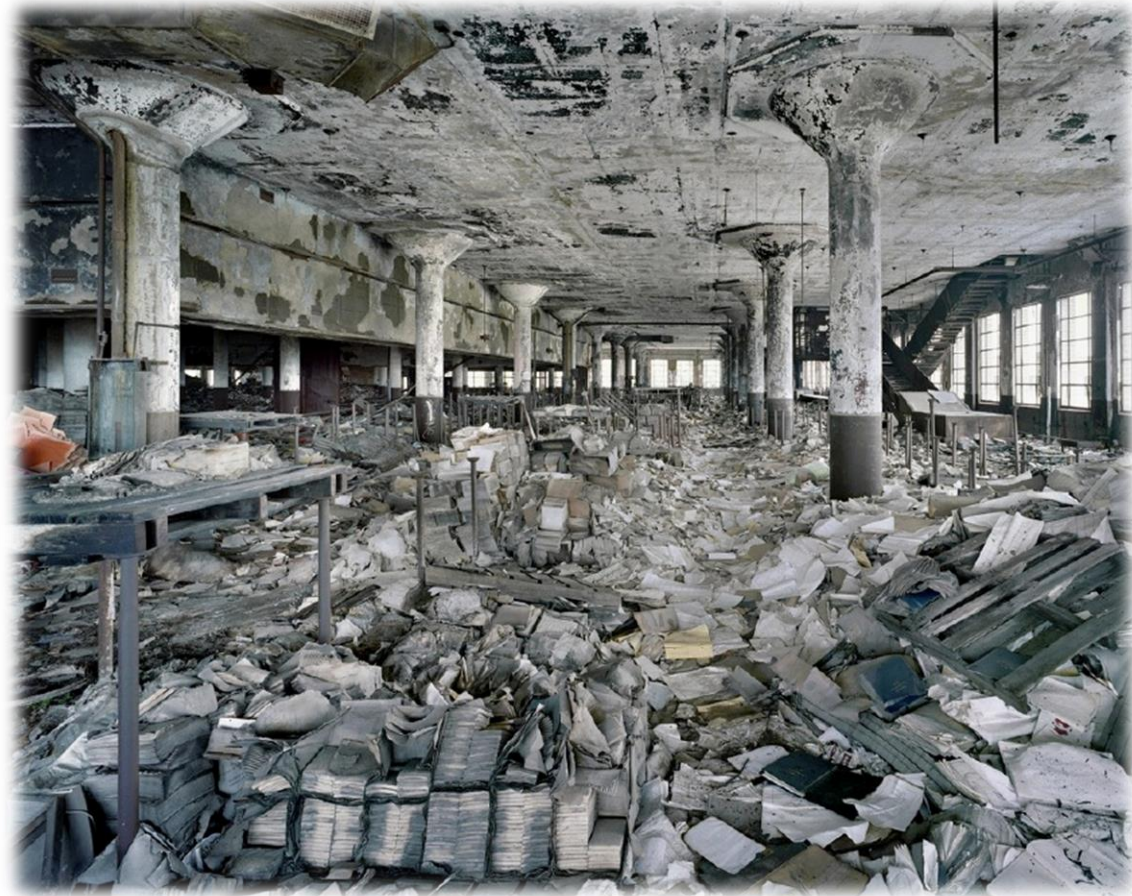
Devalued dollar in 1973



The New Global Economy: From American Century to Stagflation

Stagflation Persists

- Productivity and quality decline
- More foreign competition (Europe, Japan)
- Heavy industries decline and move abroad
- Shift to Sunbelt and to suburbs accelerate:
- Fiscal disaster for urban North/Midwest



Yves Marchand and Romain Meffre, *Detroit in Ruins*,
Public Schools Book Depository, Detroit

<http://www.dromemagazine.com/penser-la-catastrophe-the-convention/>

The New Global Economy: From American Century to Stagflation

Searching for Direction, 1974-1980

Election of 1976

- Ford challenged for Republican nomination by Ronald Reagan
- Democrats nominated Jimmy Carter
- Promised to give government back to the people
- Won a narrow victory

Economic initiatives of President Carter

- Ambitious economic agenda
- Lower unemployment and inflation
- Stimulate greater economic growth
- Balance federal budget
- Failed to accomplish any of his goals
- Economic crisis affected cities and urban areas as well



The New Global Economy: From American Century to Stagflation

Building a global information and service economy in 1970s:

Big Business

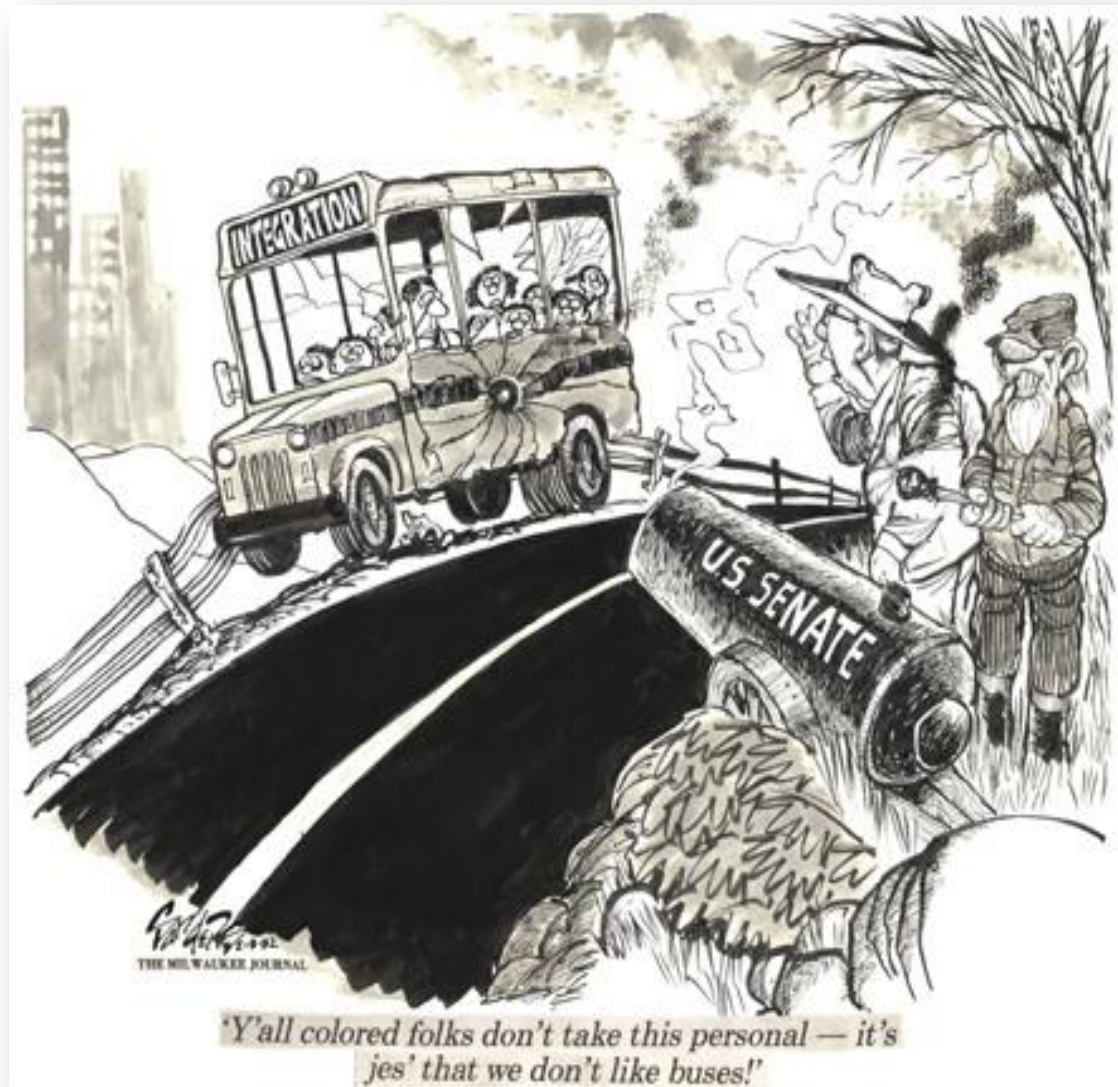
- Computers
- Consumer Debt
- Job Exporting
- Expansion of the financial industry
- Rise of the services sector



Idea of “affirmative action”

- So that groups that had historically experienced discrimination could begin to share in benefits
- Representative number of people from different groups had to have access, not just a few individuals
- Aroused ire of Republicans and conservatives in general

Cartoon lampooning Southern opposition to forced school integration via busing following the case of *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education*, 402 U.S. 1 (1970)



The Continued Struggle for Rights

Busing Controversy, Boston, 1976

Ted Landsmark was executive director of the Contractor's Association of Boston, a black trade association seeking a greater share of contracts for minority builders. Scheduled to chair a community liaison meeting at the Boston Redevelopment Authority, he rushed toward City Hall where he saw a group of whites moving toward the Federal Courthouse, brandishing banners and placards. Before he could reach the City Hall steps, someone yelled, "There's a nigger! Get him."

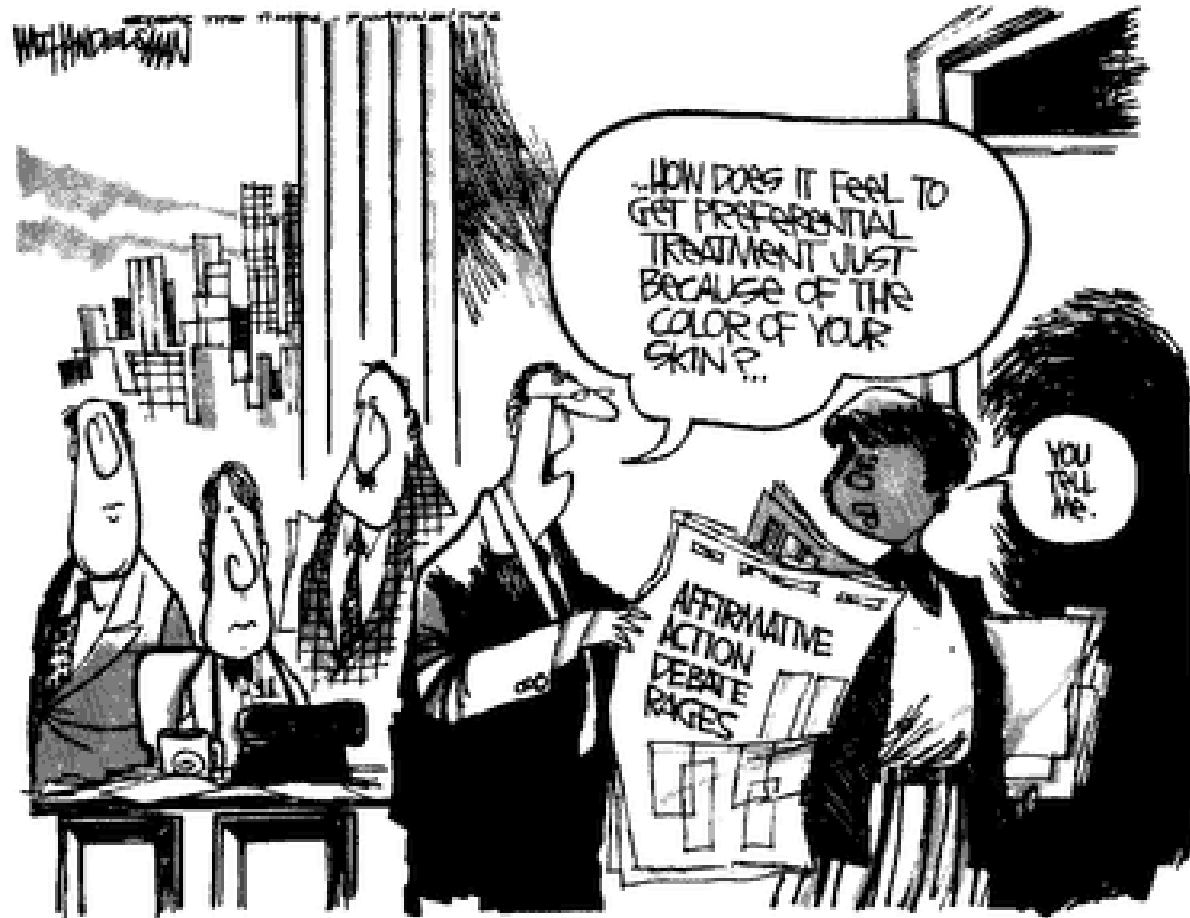


The Continued Struggle for Rights

Affirmative Action

White males oppose because:

- limit job/education prospects
- time of economic decline



Feminist Goals and Accomplishments

Challenge traditional view of rape

Roe v. Wade (1973):

- right to end pregnancy

More women attend professional schools

Colleges expand women's studies/sports

Limits of Feminist Movement

To some minority/poorer women:

- organized feminism = white, middle-class

Equal Rights Amendment (ERA)

Cultural and Social Equality



In 1967, in a celebrated incident arising from the new feminism, a race official tried to eject Kathrine Switzer from the Boston Marathon, only to be pushed aside by other runners. Considered too fragile for the marathon (whose course covers more than twenty-six miles), women were prohibited from running. Switzer completed the race, and today hundreds of thousands of women around the world compete in marathons each year.

The Continued Struggle for Rights

Feminist Goals and Accomplishments

Gays and Lesbians:

From the Stonewall Inn Riot (1969)

to the AIDS crisis (1981)



Harvey Milk in the Castro, San Francisco, circa 1977;
Country Singer and Anti-Gay Rights Activist,
Anita Bryant, 1977

The End of the New Deal Coalition

Social Conservatives

– Born of the 1960s Moral Majority

The New Religious Right and the Media

- Growth of “born again” fundamentalists in 70s
- 20% of Americans fundamentalist in 1980
- Jerry Falwell turns this into “Moral Majority Movement
- Cable television reached huge, receptive audiences



The Rev. Jerry Falwell mobilized religious conservatives, including at this 1980 rally outside the State House in Trenton.

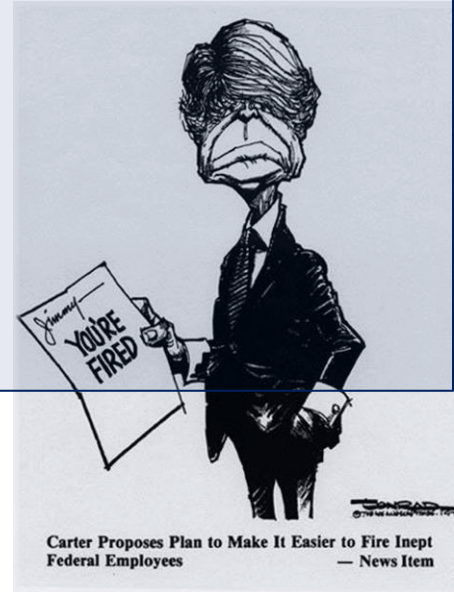
The End of New Deal Liberalism and the Rise of the New Right

Economic Conservatives – Born of the 1970s

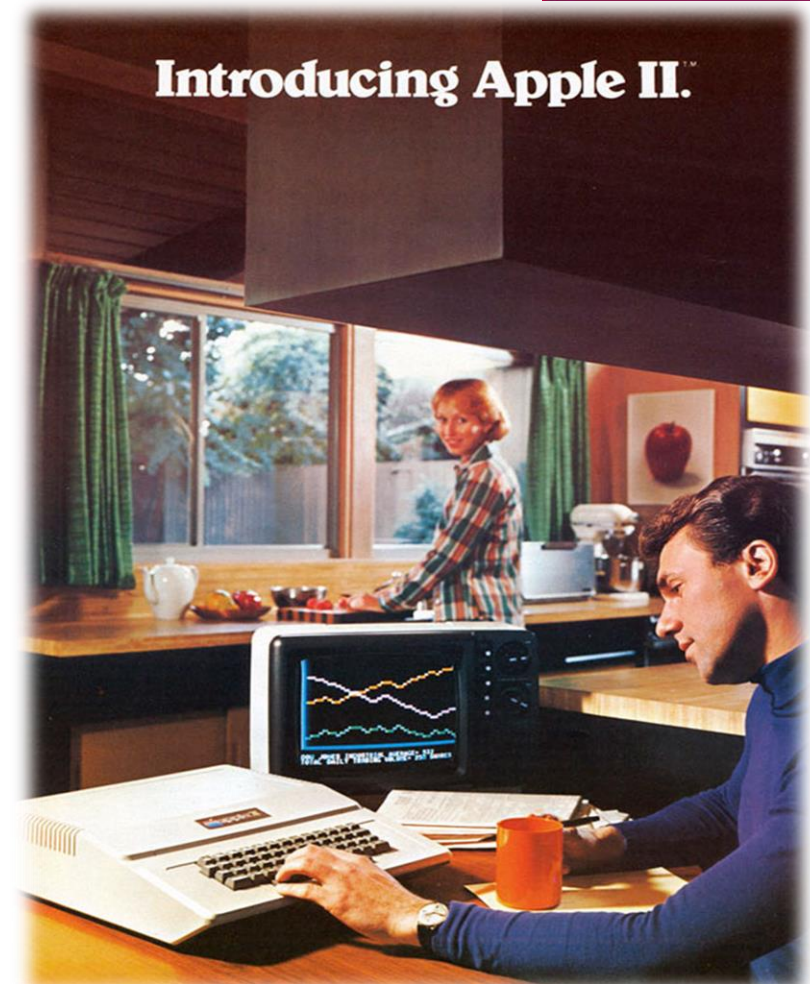
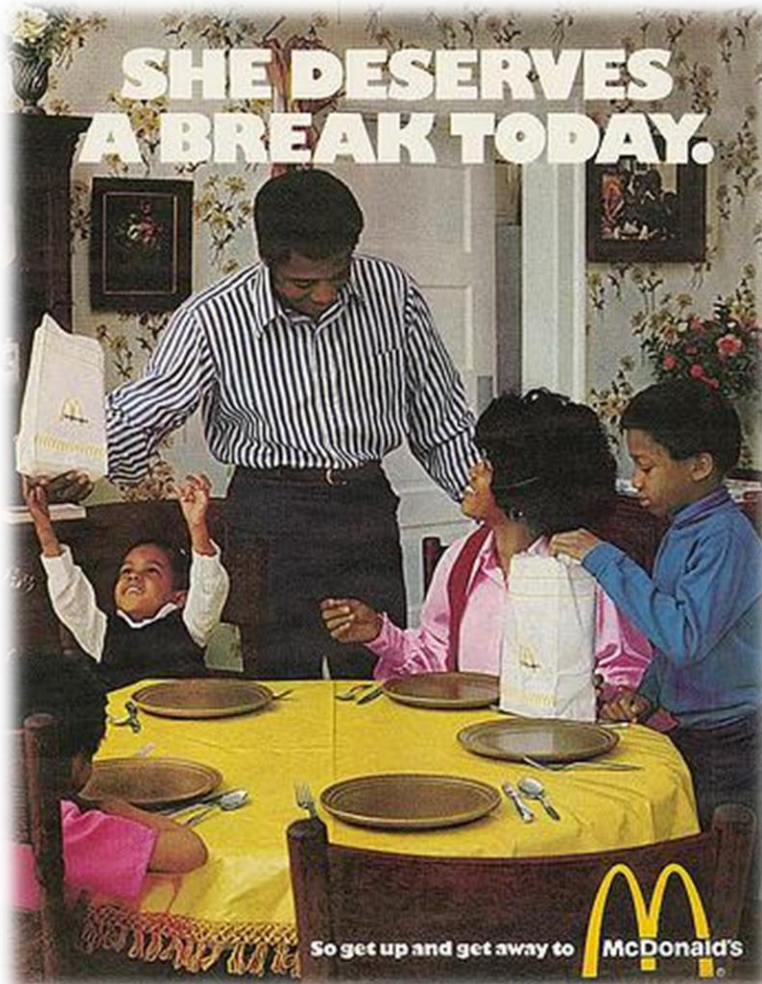
- Tax Revolts: Proposition 13 (CA, 1978)
- Combine cynicism with conservative critique of “big government”/ liberalism
- pro-business policies
- Activist U.S. Chamber of Commerce
- deregulation, corporation/wealthy tax cuts

Reagan taps into moral majority and tax revolt of 1970s:

- gain support of white “Reagan Democrats”



Reading the 1970s



How do these advertisements engage with the issue of race and class? Which looks back to the sixties, which toward the 80s?

Reading the 1970s

Presenting The Losers

Pretty good, aren't they? We admit it. And they're probably good enough to get a job practically anywhere they want.

But not as an Eastern Airlines stewardess.

We pass up around 19 girls, before we get one that qualifies. If looks were everything, it wouldn't be so tough. Sure, we want her to be pretty... don't you? That's why we look at her face, her make-up, her complexion, her figure, her weight, her legs, her grooming, her nails and her hair.

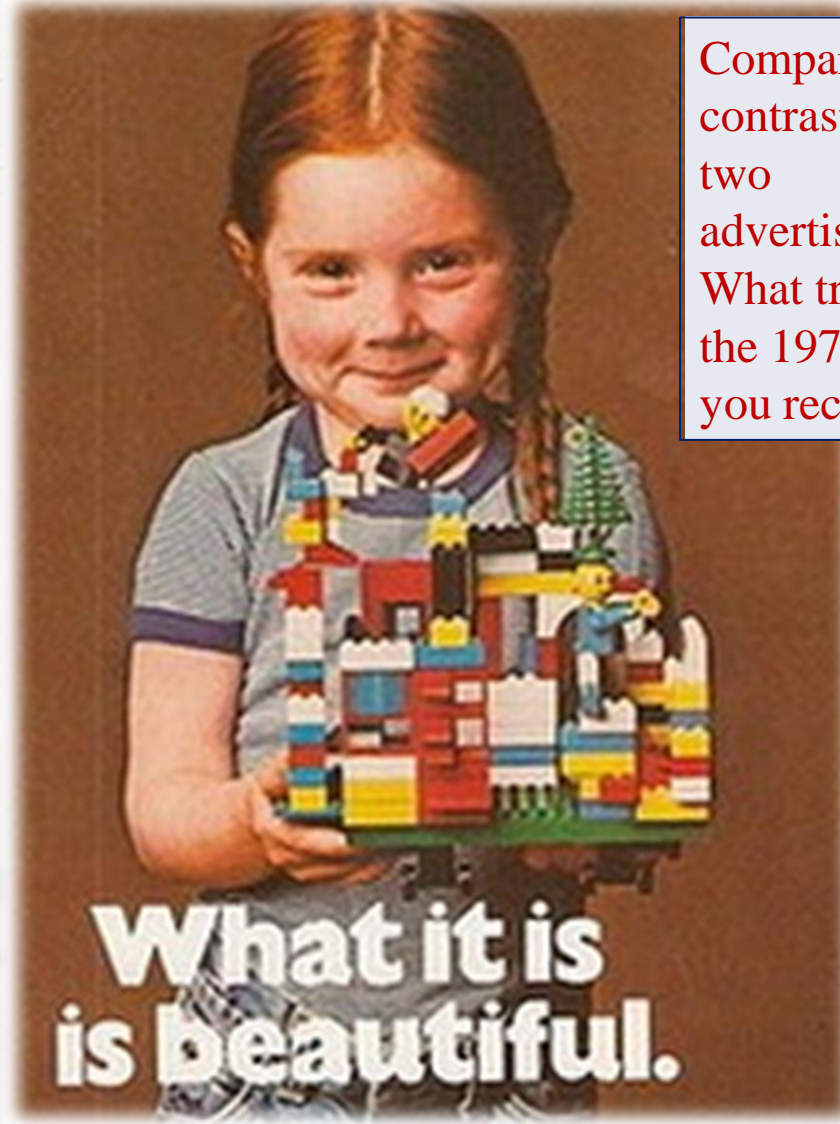
But we don't stop there. We talk. And we listen.

We listen to her voice, her speech. We judge her personality, her maturity, her intelligence, her intentions, her enthusiasm, her resiliency and her stamina.

We don't want a stewardess to be impatient with a question you may have, or careless in serving your dinner, or unconcerned about your needs.

So we try to eliminate these problems by taking a lot more time and passing up a lot more girls.

It may make our job a lot harder. But it makes your flying a lot easier.



Compare and contrast these two advertisements? What trends of the 1970s can you recognize?

Reading the 1970s

How do these cartoons understand feminism?



“...and who were you before you were married?”



“If he had a period, we’d have grant money for menstrual research.”

Martha F. Campbell, *Pulling Our Own Strings*, ed. by Gloria Kaufman and May Kay Blakely (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), pp. 26, 76.

By contrast, how do these playboy cartoons understand feminism?



Playboy (January 1971), p.203.




“As president of the committee on women’s liberation...”
Playboy (January 1971), p.249.

Reading the 1970s

Compare and contrast the messages of these advertisements on the economy of the 1970s.

**You are bright,
resourceful, alert, cool,
collected, sociable,
reliable, bubbly,
confident and pretty.**
That gives you
**1 chance in 25
of becoming a
Delta Air Lines
stewardess.**
**Like Kris
Conrad.**



**Delta is ready
when you are.**

**THIS ISN'T THE TIME TO
BUY A BIG CAR.
THIS ISN'T THE TIME TO
BUY A SMALL CAR.
NOW IS THE TIME TO BUY
A CAR THAT'S BOTH.**

Lots of people have raced to trade their big cars in for small ones due to the energy crisis. Others, speculating that the crisis is over, are buying big ones. But those who have really analyzed the situation, have made a more logical investment. They've bought Volvos.

A Volvo 144 has a relatively small appetite for fuel. It can get about 70% better mileage than most popular big cars.* Yet it can swallow an enormous quantity of people and things. In front, it has ample room for two people well over six feet; in back, room for three adults. And its deep trunk holds more than a Gremlin's and a Mustang II's, combined.

In addition, every Volvo comes with an expansive list of standard equipment. There's tinted glass, a rear window defroster, infinitely-adjustable bucket seats, fuel injection, 4-wheel power disc brakes and white-wall radial tires.



But with all these features squeezed in, a Volvo is extremely agile. It doesn't go overboard on overhang. And it turns a tighter circle than a Volkswagen Beetle.

So why choose between the disadvantages of a big car and the disadvantages of a small one?

Insist on neither. Choose a Volvo.

VOLVO
A DIVISION OF GENERAL MOTORS
CORPORATION, WARREN, MICHIGAN

*Based on 1974 EPA fuel economy estimates. Agency's Fuel Economy Guide is the best guide for the world's cars.

Found in Mom's Basement

The Crying Indian, Public Service Announcement

<http://youtu.be/j7OHG7tHrNM>

What messages about nature and American society does this PSA try to convey?

Reading the 1970s: “Born to Run”

In the day we sweat it out on the streets of a runaway
American dream.
At night we ride through the mansions of glory in suicide
machine.s
Sprung from cages out on highway 9,
Chrome wheeled, fuel-injected, and steppin' out over the line,
Oh-Oh, Baby this town rips the bones from your back.
It's a death trap; it's a suicide rap.
We gotta get out while we're young,
`Cause tramps like us, baby, we were born to run

Wendy, let me in I wanna be your friend.
I want to guard your dreams and visions.
Just wrap your legs 'round these velvet rims
and strap your hands 'cross my engines.
Together we could break this trap.
We'll run till we drop, baby, we'll never go back.
Oh-Oh, Will you walk with me out on the wire?
`Cause, baby, I'm just a scared and lonely rider,
But I gotta know how it feels.
I want to know if love is wild.
Babe, I want to know if love is real

Oh, can you show me?

Beyond the Palace hemi-powered drones scream down the
boulevard.
Girls comb their hair in rearview mirrors,
And the boys try to look so hard.
The amusement park rises bold and stark.
Kids are huddled on the beach in a mist.
I wanna die with you, Wendy, on the street tonight
In an everlasting kiss.

The highway's jammed with broken heroes on a last chance
power drive.
Everybody's out on the run tonight,
but there's no place left to hide.
Together, Wendy, we can live with the sadness.
I'll love you with all the madness in my soul.
Oh-Oh, Someday girl, I don't know when,
We're gonna get to that place
Where we really wanna go,
and we'll walk in the sun.
But till then tramps like us,
baby, we were born to run.

Oh honey, tramps like us,
baby, we were born to run. (2x)

What vision of the
future does Bruce
Springsteen offer in
this song from 1975?

Final slide

Thank you