The 1970s looms as one of the most misunderstood decades in recent American history. Often dismissed as "The Me Decade" or worse, historical memory has tended to undervalue this era largely due to its placement between the ubiquitous images of a more radical 1960s and the dawn of a new conservatism linked with Ronald Reagan in the 1980s. This course looks to reconsider the 1970s and regards the decade as a significant historical period where a cultural foundation was laid that continues to influence contemporary society.

This course offers a detailed cultural history of one of the most spectacular, complicated, contradictory, yet utterly influential decades in recent memory. Set between images of the “liberal 60s” and the “conservative 80s,” the 1970s served an important transitional role in helping to reposition America as the nation began to shift from an industrial economy to a society based on technology and information. The corresponding social and economic shifts were often most evident in areas of culture and politics.

1970s America looks to assess these social, cultural, and political shifts in an effort to rectify previous misunderstandings about the era and to offer a working definition of the decade as it pertains to contemporary American identity. In this regard, the course will rely on multiple examples from film, television, music, as well as politics, along with an analysis of other social and cultural events from the era to assist in defining and explaining such a confounding, though utterly significant decade. Topics of discussion will revolve around figures/events such as the Manson murders, the kidnapping of heiress Patty Hearst, Jim Jones and the People’s Temple, the Roman Polanski case, Vietnam, Nixon and Watergate, Muhammad Ali, Angela Davis, Black Panther Party, Weather Underground, “New Hollywood,” “Blaxploitation,” among other examples.
Screenings:

8/26 *Easy Riders*, Dennis Hopper (1969)


9/16 *Taxi Driver*, Martin Scorsese (1976)


9/23 *Free Angela and All Political Prisoners*, Shola Lynch (2012)


9/30 *Nixon By Nixon: In His Own Words*, Peter Kunhardt (2014)

10/7 *All the President’s Men*, Alan J. Pakula (1976)

10/14 *The Spook Who Sat By the Door*, Sam Greenlee (1973)


10/28 *When We Were Kings*, Leon Gast (1996)

10/28 *No No: A Dockumentary*, Jeff Radice (2014)

11/4 *Wattstax*, Mel Stuart (1973)


11/25 Thanksgiving Break

Readings:


