

## Final Paper

Your first paper was an exercise in description. Your final project will bring these together as an exercise in synthesis across all periods of this course.

These are general questions that reach across a single theme through the course. Your answers should cite a several different works from throughout the span of the course; in most cases it will not be helpful to cite documents from outside the class, but you can if you wish. (And it may be helpful to cite examples discussed in class but not assigned on the readings; see the course slides or contact me if you want a citation on particular matter.)

You can't cite everything from class, obviously, but if you do not cite obviously germane readings to the points you are making, that will stand against you; and you must choose an argument that engages with the readings.

(As a rule of thumb; if you go more than a paragraph talking about general issues without grounding them in readings, you're probably off track; and if you talk just about one reading for more than two paragraphs, you're probably off track.)

As always, a careful consideration of counterarguments—particularly those that moderate your own initial views—will substantially strengthen your paper.

Since this paper is somewhat longer, take care to structure them coherently.

### Paper Prompts

1. Was the computer a *revolutionary* development in the history of data collection, analysis, and storage that dramatically transformed the way data was collected and used? Or was it, instead, *evolutionary*, fitting into trends that already existed? Consider how structurally similar tasks were accomplished before and after computerization.
2. Concerns about *privacy* have been paramount in many of the discussions of data collection we've read and discussed in this class. Are privacy and the collection of large-scale data necessarily antagonistic? What can historical examples tell us about the possibilities for privacy to be maintained? When have different historical actors found the benefits of increased data collection to outweigh their costs in privacy?
3. The writer Tracy Kidder observed around the year 1980 that computers "made fine tools for the centralization of power." Particularly with reference to data collection, has this claim held up through the era of personal computers? Was this because of the way computers were used, or was it inherent in the technology itself? Has large-scale data collection always led to the centralization of power, or are there reasons to think it might undercut it?
4. The Coronavirus crisis has placed new demands on data collectors, privacy advocates, state collectors, and scientists. Make a sustained argument about to improve some aspect of the way that we handle data issues surrounding COVID-19 from historical example. It may be about how we monitor people or manage privacy, how we store and disseminate information, or how the public discusses the trustworthiness of data. The historical examples must, though, draw tightly from multiple different channels of this course.

**Drafts and edits**

I will not read full drafts, but can read and comment on drafts of your first paragraph submitted by May 12. This paragraph should spell out both your argument and give a sense of the kinds of evidence you will use. Please send these to me by e-mail. I may take up to 3 days to respond.

**Comments**

If you would like written comments on your paper, please make a note at the top of the document. Otherwise, I will simply submit your final course grade after grading the paper.

**Citations**

You should cite the works that you quote and refer to in the text in a **consistent** format. I recommend the [Chicago documentary note format](#): with it, you give a full citation the first time you use a text, and smaller ones later. For medium-length papers like this, you may omit a final page bibliography if your initial citations are complete. If you prefer to use a social-science author-date format with final bibliography, that is also acceptable.

The best software for generating well-formatted citations is the free program Zotero.

If you wish to cite class discussion or lecture, place it in a footnote.

**Length and Formatting.**

Your paper should be between 2500 and 3000 words long, not including notes or bibliography. Properly formatted (which is to say, double spaced with a 12 point serifed font like Times New Roman) that should be about 8 to 10 pages.

**Due Date**

Papers should be submitted *electronically via NYU Courses* by 5 pm on May 15. Late papers will be penalized a third of a letter grade for each 24-hour period they are overdue. Grades will be submitted to the registrar on May 18.