

# Alvin Toffler

<b>Alvin Toffler</b>	
 <p style="text-align: center;">Alvin Toffler (2006)</p>	
<b>Born</b>	4 October 1928 New York City
<b>Residence</b>	Los Angeles, California
<b>Nationality</b>	 United States
<b>Ethnicity</b>	Jewish
<b>Education</b>	Multiple honorary doctorates
<i>Alma mater</i>	New York University
<b>Occupation</b>	Futurist, journalist, writer
<b>Known for</b>	<i>Future Shock</i> , <i>The Third Wave</i>
<b>Board member of</b>	International Institute for Strategic Studies
<b>Spouse</b>	Heidi Toffler
<b>Awards</b>	McKinsey Foundation Book Award for Contributions to Management Literature, Officier de L'Ordre des Arts et Lettres
<b>Notes</b>	[1]

**Alvin Toffler** (born October 4, 1928 in New York City<sup>[2]</sup>) is an American writer and futurist, known for his works discussing the digital revolution, communication revolution, corporate revolution and technological singularity.

A former associate editor of *Fortune* magazine, his early work focused on technology and its impact (through effects like information overload). Then he moved to examining the reaction of and changes in society. His later focus has been on the increasing power of 21st century military hardware, weapons and technology proliferation, and capitalism.

He founded Toffler Associates, a management consulting company, and was a visiting scholar at the Russell Sage Foundation, visiting professor at Cornell University, faculty member of the New School for Social Research, a White House correspondent, an editor of *Fortune* magazine, and a business consultant.<sup>[3]</sup>

Toffler is married to Heidi Toffler, also a writer and futurist. They live in the Bel Air section of Los Angeles, California, just north of Sunset Boulevard.

The couple's only child, Karen Toffler, (1954–2000) died after more than a decade suffering from Guillain Barre Syndrome at the age of 46<sup>[4]</sup> <sup>[5]</sup>

## Early life and career

Alvin Toffler was born in New York city in 1928. He met his future wife, Heidi, at New York University where he was an English major and she was starting a graduate course in linguistics. Being radical students, they decided against further graduate work, moved to the Midwestern United States, married, spending the next five years as blue-collar workers on assembly lines while studying industrial mass production in their daily work. Heidi became a union shop steward in the aluminum foundry where she worked. Alvin became a millwright and welder.<sup>[6]</sup>

Their hands-on practical labor experience got Toffler a position on a union-backed newspaper, a transfer to its Washington bureau, then three years as a correspondent covering Congress and the White House for a Pennsylvania daily. Meanwhile his wife worked at a specialized library for business and behavioral science.<sup>[6]</sup>

They returned to New York City when *Fortune* magazine invited Alvin to become its labor columnist, later having him write about business and management.<sup>[6]</sup>

After leaving *Fortune* magazine, Alvin Toffler was hired by IBM to do research and write a paper on the social and organizational impact of computers, leading to his contact with the earliest computer “gurus” and artificial intelligence researchers and proponents. Xerox invited him to write about its research laboratory and AT&T consulted him for strategic advice. This AT&T work led to a study of telecommunications which advised its top management for the company to break up more than a decade before the government forced AT&T to break up.<sup>[6]</sup>

In the mid-'60s the Tofflers began work on what would later become *Future Shock*.<sup>[6]</sup>

In 1996, with Tom Johnson, an American business consultant, they co-founded Toffler Associates, an advisory firm designed to implement many of the ideas the Tofflers have written on. The firm worked with businesses, NGOs, and governments in the U.S., South Korea, Mexico, Brazil, Singapore, Australia and other countries.<sup>[6]</sup>

## His ideas

Toffler explains, “Society needs people who take care of the elderly and who know how to be compassionate and honest. Society needs people who work in hospitals. Society needs all kinds of skills that are not just cognitive; they’re emotional, they’re affectional. You can’t run the society on data and computers alone.”<sup>[7]</sup> Toffler is also frequently cited as stating: “Tomorrow’s illiterate will not be the man who can’t read; he will be the man who has not learned how to learn.” The words came from Herbert Gerjuoy, whom Toffler cites in full as follows: “The new education must teach the individual how to classify and reclassify information, how to evaluate its veracity, how to change categories when necessary, how to move from the concrete to the abstract and back, how to look at problems from a new direction — how to teach himself. Tomorrow’s illiterate will not be the man who can’t read; he will be the man who has not learned how to learn.”

In his book *The Third Wave* Toffler describes three types of societies, based on the concept of “waves”—each wave pushes the older societies and cultures aside.

- **First Wave** is the society after agrarian revolution and replaced the first hunter-gatherer cultures.
- **Second Wave** is the society during the Industrial Revolution (ca. late 17th century through the mid-20th century). The main components of the Second Wave society are nuclear family, factory-type education system and the corporation. Toffler writes: “The Second Wave Society is industrial and based on mass production, mass distribution, mass consumption, mass education, mass media, mass recreation, mass entertainment, and weapons of mass destruction. You combine those things with standardization, centralization, concentration, and synchronization, and you wind up with a style of organization we call bureaucracy.”
- **Third Wave** is the post-industrial society. Toffler would also add that since the late 1950s most countries are moving away from a Second Wave Society into what he would call a Third Wave Society. He coined lots of words to describe it and mentions names invented by him (super-industrial society) and other people (like the Information Age, Space Age, Electronic Era, Global Village, technetronic age, scientific-technological revolution), which to various degrees predicted demassification, diversity, knowledge-based production, and the

acceleration of change (one of Toffler's key maxims is "change is non-linear and can go backwards, forwards and sideways").

In this post-industrial society, there is a wide diversity of lifestyles ("subcultures"). Adhocracies (fluid organizations) adapt quickly to changes. Information can substitute most of the material resources (see ersatz) and becomes the main material for workers (cognitarians instead of proletarians), who are loosely affiliated. Mass customization offers the possibility of cheap, personalized, production catering to small niches (see just-in-time production).

The gap between producer and consumer is bridged by technology using a so called configuration system. "Prosumers" can fill their own needs (see open source, assembly kit, freelance work). This was the notion that new technologies are enabling the radical fusion of the producer and consumer into the *prosumer*. In some cases *prosuming* entails a "third job" where the corporation "outsources" its labor not to other countries, but to the unpaid consumer, such as when we do our own banking through an ATM instead of a teller that the bank must employ, or trace our own postal packages on the internet instead of relying on a paid clerk.

Since the 1960s, people have been trying to make sense out of the impact of new technologies and social change. Toffler's writings have been influential beyond the confines of scientific, economic and public policy discussions. Techno music pioneer Juan Atkins cites Toffler's phrase "techno rebels" in *The Third Wave* as inspiring him to use the word "techno" to describe the musical style he helped to create<sup>[8]</sup> Toffler's works and ideas have been subject to various criticisms, usually with the same argumentation used against futurology: that foreseeing the future is nigh impossible. In the 1990s, his ideas were publicly lauded by Newt Gingrich.

The development Toffler believes may go down as this era's greatest turning point is the creation of wealth in outer space. Wealth today, he argues, is created everywhere (globalisation), nowhere (cyberspace), and out there (outer space). Global positioning satellites are key to synchronising precision time and data streams for everything from cellphone calls to ATM withdrawals. They allow just-in-time (JIT) productivity because of precise tracking. GPS is also becoming central to air-traffic control. And satellites increase agricultural productivity through tracking weather, enabling more accurate forecasts.

Two major predictions of Toffler's—the paperless office and human cloning—have yet to be realized.

## Critical acclaim

Accenture, the management consultancy firm, has dubbed him the third most influential voice among business leaders, after Bill Gates and Peter Drucker. He has also been described in the *Financial Times* as the "world's most famous futurologist." People's Daily classes him among the 50 foreigners that shaped modern China.<sup>[9]</sup>

## Selected awards

He is the recipient of several prestigious prizes, including the McKinsey Foundation Book Award for Contributions to Management Literature, Officier de L'Ordre des Arts et Lettres, and appointments, including Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science and the International Institute for Strategic Studies.<sup>[3]</sup>

In late 2006, the Tofflers were recipients of Brown University's Independent Award.<sup>[10]</sup>

## Bibliography

Alvin Toffler co-wrote his books with his wife Heidi. A few of their well-known works are:

- *Future Shock* (1970) Bantam Books ISBN 0-553-27737-5
- *The Eco-Spasm Report* (1975) Bantam Books ISBN 0-553-14474-X
- *The Third Wave* (1980) Bantam Books ISBN 0-553-24698-4
- *Previews & Premises* (1983) William Morrow & Co ISBN 0-688-01910-2
- *The Adaptive Corporation* (1985) McGraw-Hill ISBN 0-553-25383-2
- *Powershift: Knowledge, Wealth and Violence at the Edge of the 21st Century* (1990) Bantam Books ISBN 0-553-29215-3
- *War and Anti-War* (1995) Warner Books ISBN 0-446-60259-0
- *Revolutionary Wealth* (2006) Knopf ISBN 0-375-40174-1

## References

- [1] Alvin & Heidi Toffler website (<http://www.alvintoffler.net/>)
- [2] Alvin Toffler (<http://www.imdb.com/name/nm1176736/>) at the Internet Movie Database
- [3] "Alvin Toffler Speaker Biography" (<http://www.milkeninstitute.org/events/events.taf?function=show&cat=allconf&EventID=GC03&SPID=898&level1=speakers&level2=bio>)—Milken Institute, 2003.
- [4] "Paid Notice: Deaths TOFFLER, KAREN" (<http://www.nytimes.com/2000/07/11/classified/paid-notice-deaths-toffler-karen.html>). *New York Times*. July 11, 2000. .
- [5] <http://www.flickr.com/photos/urbanphotos/2415309182/>
- [6] "Alvin and Heidi Toffler: Partnership (<http://www.alvintoffler.net/?fa=biopartnership>)—Toffler website
- [7] Alvin Toffler interviewed by Norman Swann (<http://www.abc.net.au/rn/talks/lm/stories/s10440.htm>), Australian Broadcasting Corporation Radio National, "Life Matters," 5 March 1998.
- [8] Ferguson, Benjamin (15 June 2010). "Label of love: Metroplex" (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2010/jun/15/label-love-metroplex>). *The Guardian*. .
- [9] 50 foreigners shaping China's modern development ([http://english.people.com.cn/200608/03/eng20060803\\_289510.html](http://english.people.com.cn/200608/03/eng20060803_289510.html)), 30 August 2006. Coverage at the Tofflers' site ([http://www.alvintoffler.net/?fa=china\\_top50](http://www.alvintoffler.net/?fa=china_top50))
- [10] Bios and Affiliations (<http://www.alvintoffler.net/?fa=biosaffiliations>)—Toffler website

## External links

- Official website (<http://www.alvintoffler.net>)
- Toffler Associates (<http://www.toffler.com>), the executive advisory firm formed by Alvin and Heidi Toffler.
- After Words: Alvin Toffler interviewed by Newt Gingrich (Real Audio format) ([http://www.booktv.org/ram/AfterWords/0606/arc\\_btv060406\\_4.ram](http://www.booktv.org/ram/AfterWords/0606/arc_btv060406_4.ram))
- Alvin Toffler interview on *The Gregory Mantell Show* (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8DWj-G-VZEQ>)
- BookTalk.org: discuss Alvin Toffler's *Future Shock* with other readers (<http://www.booktalk.org/future-shock-by-alvin-toffler-f47.html>)
- Works by Alvin Toffler on Open Library at the Internet Archive

# Article Sources and Contributors

**Alvin Toffler** *Source:* <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?oldid=463643361> *Contributors:* 2help, 777sms, Adrian.benko, Alan Liefing, Andycjp, AnimalExtender, AstroNomer, AubreyEllenShomo, Beland, Bellemonde, Bhoeble, Blissfulpain, Bobblewik, Boing! said Zebedee, Bolivian Unicyclist, Brz7, CQJ, Cbdorsett, Chiwara, Chowbok, ChrisHodgesUK, Cobaltcigs, Conversion script, Coolcaesar, D6, DJ Clayworth, Darkwind, David Kernow, DeGabor, Deineka, Deor, Ed Poor, Edward, Ejennings, El C, Elerium, EncMstr, Error, Ethel the aardvark, FayssalF, Feinerman, Felicity4711, Feydey, Fredrik, Fudoreaper, Gena3314, Ghirlandajo, Graham87, Gsociology, Gurch, Gzornenplatz, Haaqfun, Hack-Man, Hmains, Hnc197, Hooperbloob, Interiot, JacquesDemien, JayJasper, Jdpiffle, Jeffschuler, Jeronimo, Jmabel, Johnfos, Khalid hassani, Kookyunii, Levin, Lexor, Liberal Saudi, Lillingen, Lir, Lop.dong, LouI, MER-C, Magioladitis, Makryba, Malcolm Farmer, Maltiti2005, Mantellg, Maork, Martarius, Masterpiece2000, MementoVivere, Mgottlieb2011, Michael Hardy, Minority Report, Miracle Pen, Mrn3, Nate Silva, Neelix, Nixdorf, Noren, One Night In Hackney, Ortolan88, Oswald Glinkmeyer, Pacific1982, Parkjunwung, Paul A, Paul Gard, PeepP, Phatom87, Phnom Penh Punks, Phoenix-forgotten, PierreAbbat, Piotrus, Portillo, Project2501a, RBJC006, RJBurkhardt3, Rbrwr, Rich Farmbrough, Robinstocks, SDC, Sadads, Sanilunlu, Shadowjams, Sputnikcccp, Sylvain Mielot, Tarquin, TenOfAllTrades, ThirdWave, Tmkly3, Tomos, True Pagan Warrior, Ttwo, Van der Hoorn, Wikiklrsc, Wikiwikiphilia, Wragge, YowiePower, Zazaban, Zigo1232, Алий Король, زرشک, さえぼー, 104 anonymous edits

# Image Sources, Licenses and Contributors

**File:Alvin Toffler 02.jpg** *Source:* [http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=File:Alvin\\_Toffler\\_02.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=File:Alvin_Toffler_02.jpg) *License:* Creative Commons Attribution-Sharealike 2.0 *Contributors:* Vern Evans

**File:Flag of the United States.svg** *Source:* [http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=File:Flag\\_of\\_the\\_United\\_States.svg](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=File:Flag_of_the_United_States.svg) *License:* Public Domain *Contributors:* Anomie

# License

---

Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported  
[//creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/)