

STSC 3657-301: Technology & Democracy

- Tuesday and Thursday, 5:15 PM-6:44 PM -

Prospectus, Professor Adelheid Voskuhl

All plans outlined here are preliminary and subject to change as circumstances change.

We explore in this class concerns at various places and times around the globe about the relationship between technological systems and political governance. Most of our material will focus on technologies and governance during industrial periods (c. 1750 to 1930) and digital (often called “post-industrial”) periods (c. 1940 to 2022). We investigate and compare social change coming with rapid industrialization, changes in political participation and action coming with digitization and electronic computers in the period after 1945, and representation of technological and (anti-)democratic thinking in popular media, film, and literature. We also use the city of Philadelphia as a source of material and inspiration for our class, such as industrial and “rust-belt” architecture, political participation in our city’s government, and institutions such as the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the Science History Institute.

Course materials include reflections on democracy and technological change by philosophers, entrepreneurs, and politicians; historical and sociological analyses of current and past experiences of technological and political change; and artistic treatments of our class’s themes in films, paintings, and literature.

Select course materials:

Reading:

- J. Justin Castro and James A. Garza. *Technocratic Visions: Engineers, Technology, and Society in Mexico*. University of Pittsburgh Press 2022
- Ananny, Mike, et al., *Digital Technology and Democratic Theory*. Edited by Lucy Bernholz and Hélène Landemore and Rob Reich. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, [2021]
- Tocqueville, Alexis de., *Democracy In America*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007.
- Gates, Bill, and Janet Lowe. *Bill Gates Speaks: Insight From the World's Greatest Entrepreneur*. New York: John Wiley, 1998.
- Locke, Jill, and Eileen M. Hunt. *Feminist Interpretations of Alexis De Tocqueville*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009.
- Herbert Hoover, “The Dangerous Road for Democracy,” Oklahoma City, Oklahoma
- May 5, 1938 (speech)
- Rozman, Gilbert, *Democratization, National Identity and Foreign Policy In Asia*. Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY : Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2021.
- Fleming, W. Lynwood. *Documentary history of reconstruction: political, military, social, religious, educational & industrial, 1865 to the present time*. Cleveland, O.: The A. H. Clark company, 1906 (chapter VII: “The Union League of America”).

Films:

- Pirates of Silicon Valley (1999)

- Tomorrow Never Dies (1997)
- The Great Hack (2019)
- Chinatown (1974)

Course Activities:

We meet twice a week: a lecture on Tuesday and a group discussion on Thursday. Please come prepared on Thursdays with texts read carefully and films watched closely. There will also be off-site assignments to explore the city of Philadelphia and uncover our industrial/digital and democratic past and present, and appreciate in more depth conflicts and celebrations of technology and democracy right on our doorstep.

Requirements and Grading:

There are three assignments (two regular analytical essays interpreting the readings, one photo essay of an excursion in Philadelphia) which each make up 20 percent of the grade. Class participation in the form of discussion contributions, as well as scheduled individual meetings with the instructor, make up the remaining 40 percent of the grade.