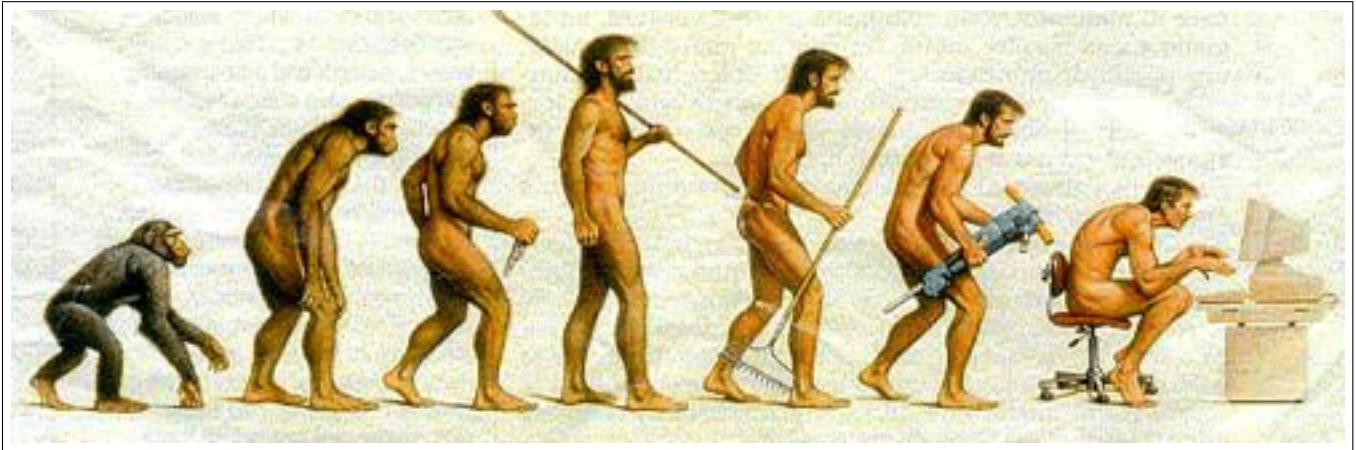


Nerds in America: Technological Enthusiasm in American History



Americans have long had a unique relationship with technology. Enthusiasm for technological solutions to social, economic, and political problems has been a cornerstone of American life since the founding of the Republic. From Eli Whitney to Thomas Edison to Henry Ford to Bill Gates, the inventor hero has achieved an almost mythical stature in contemporary culture.

In this course we will explore the history of the “nerd” – and the central role of technology in American life past and present – from a variety of historical and popular culture perspectives. The focus will be on situating the history of technology into its larger social and political history.

Science, Technology, and Society • STSC 060 • Fall 2007

STSC060: Nerds in America

Professor Nathan L. Ensmenger
Office Hours: M-W, 2-4 pm, 362 Logan Hall
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Course Format:

The seminar meets only once a week. This means that attendance is particularly important. If you do need to miss class please let me know in advance. Grading will be based on three components: class participation (30%), weekly response papers (40%), and a final paper /presentation(30%). Your class participation grade will be based on attendance and your ability to actively demonstrate your mastery of the readings during in-class discussions. The weekly response papers will be short (2-3 pages) papers that emphasize synthetic and analytical thinking. The final project will be developed over the course of the second half of the semester, and will allow you to research a topic of individual interest. The final product will be a 10-15 page research paper or a combination paper/presentation (depending on the particular project that you choose – some projects are better suited to a multi-media presentation than a traditional research paper).

Required Readings:

All of the books are available at the Penn Book Center. **Please Note:** The Penn Book Center is not the University Bookstore. It is an independent bookseller located on the corner of 34th and Sansom.

Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden*
Howard Segal, *Technological Utopianism in America*
Mark Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*
Thomas Hughes, *American Genesis*
Kurt Vonnegut, *Player Piano*
Tracy Kidder, *The Soul of a New Machine*
Sherry Turkle, *The Second Self*
Douglas Coupland, *Microserfs*

You can also order the books online, borrow them from friends, etc. Copies are also on reserve in the Rosengarten Reading Room.

Course Schedule:

Sep 11: Introduction

Sep 18: Building the New Republic

Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden*

Sep 25: We'll all be happy then . . .

Howard Segal, *Technological Utopianism in America*

Oct 2: Yankee Ingenuity

Mark Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*

Oct 9: Mad Scientists, Evil Corporations

Film: The Man in the White Suit

Oct 16: Fall Break

No class. Relax. Have fun.

Oct 23: Inventors, Entrepreneurs, System Builders

Thomas Hughes, *American Genesis*

Oct 30: The Engineer as Romantic Hero (really!)

Cecelia Tichi, *Shifting Gears*

The Tichi book is unfortunately out-of-print. I will provide printed copies of a few select chapters for us to read.

Nov 6: The World Is An Engineer's Paradise

Kurt Vonnegut, *Player Piano*

Nov 13: Hardy Boys & Microkids

Tracy Kidder, *The Soul of a New Machine*

Nov 20: The Ugliest Man in America

Sherry Turkle, *The Second Self*

Nov 27: Chairman Bill Leads the Happy Workers in Song

Douglas Coupland, *Microserfs*

Dec 4: Big Finish

In which all is made clear.