Communication 230 A, B, C: Seminar on Digital Civil Society

SYLLABUS

Winter 2020, Comm 230B

Digital Civil Society 2000-2010: How did we get here? Booms, Busts, and Revolution

In a short three decades we've seen the hope for digital networks shift from liberating and democratizing to an anxious age of surveillance capitalism. How did this happen, what's being done about it, and what does it mean for democratic governance and collective action in the future? The class examines the ways in which digital technology shapes how we communicate, organize, advocate, and engage with each other in markets, politics, and civil society. We will focus on the ways digital networks and technologies have changed how people come together to make change in the world, a sphere of action commonly called the social sector.

This is a year-long course, designed and offered as three independent quarters. Fall quarter focuses on the 1990s — the popular adoption of the internet in the northern hemisphere, the development of international digital networks, the creation of anchor digital civil society organizations (such as the Electronic Frontier Foundation and the Internet Archive), the emergence of the digital economy and the dot com bubble, global shifts in journalism coverage, key technology legislation and legal battles over free expression. Winter quarter shifts to the 2000s — the emergence of social media platforms, the rise of mobile connectivity, institutional shifts in journalism, and major developments in intellectual property, state surveillance, and digital activism. In Spring Quarter we focus on the 2010s and the future, from the Arab Spring and global political propaganda to electronic governments and biotechnologies. Across all three quarters, we will analyze the opportunities and the challenges to associational life, free expression, individual privacy, and collective action. We will examine the technological, organizational, legal, economic, and social shifts that have accompanied our growing global dependence on digital networks. The class draws from law, media studies, political science, and history, bringing in research perspectives from Europe, the U.S, and African scholarship.

Each quarter includes a "demo day" of student presentations, open to the campus public, in which we will be highlighting projects that examine the key themes of the course from different disciplines. Students will write one final paper or produce one project per quarter, based in their own disciplinary methods or integrated with others in a group project. Students are also responsible for leading at least one class session per quarter.

Objectives: After completing the course, students should be able to:
- Critique common assumptions about internet history: that the internet is an inherently open network, that it increases civic and political participation, and that it has always been a Silicon Valley success story.
- Understand the impact of national and international laws and treaties on both the marketplace that shapes digital networks, software and hardware and on the nature and possibilities of associational life and political and civic activism.
- Be familiar with the different approaches to these issues taken by historians, media scholars, legal scholars, journalists, and political scientists.
- Understand the interactions between digital technology, markets, politics, and civil society.
- Be familiar with the history of anchor digital civil society organizations.
- Define the different constraints posed on civil society by law and policy, technological designs, and social norms.
- Formulate historically informed arguments on whether there are normative constraints we should put on digital technologies to strengthen civil society and how can we overcome them.
- Lead classmates in discussions of existing research in relationship to developments in digital civil society.
- Draft original writing on digital civil society topics and incorporate peer-review feedback.
- Critique work presented by peers with an eye to strengthening the quality of the scholarship.
- Apply theoretical concepts to practical applications, workshop and present ideas relevant to the application of the class themes to the real world.

Meeting schedule and grading: This is a 3 unit class, including one weekly seminar of 2 hours and a mandatory public speaker series that includes student presentations and leadership (Digital Civil Society +1 Series, Comm 230 X). The course can be taken for letter grades or credit/no credit.

Assignment:

For your final assignment, you have the choice between:

- Option 1: a paper analyzing an example of digital civil society. Situate it within relevant scholarship, explain why it is an example of digital civil society, and make an original argument about it.

- Option 2: a piece of writing, or a tool, that fits into a broader project you are working on and that is relevant to the theme of digital civil society (e.g. a chapter from an honors or Ph.D. thesis, a qualifying paper; designing a prototype or a tool, etc.).

Length. 10 - 15 pages (excluding bibliography), or 2500 - 4000 words (excluding bibliography). If you choose option 2 and decide to create a tool, toolkit, or prototype, you are required to discuss this with your mentor to determine the appropriate page length.

Scope and research question. Whether you take option 1 or 2, you will work with your assigned mentor(s) to develop your research question, to identify an argumentative structure and to delineate the scope of the paper that is most appropriate for the class. Make sure to communicate regularly with your mentor(s) and seek their guidance on this.

Sources. Draw on at least 3 peer-reviewed articles or books. Use Stanford SearchWorks to find scholarship that is relevant to your topic. Engage with class readings if pertinent to your topic. You are not required to collect primary sources, only secondary sources in the form of academic scholarship.

Citation Style. Any style accepted, so long as it is consistent. We recommend APA, MLA, or Chicago Style. Zotero (Links to an external site.) is a tool that you may find useful to store references and to compile a systematically formatted reference list instantly. Members of the teaching team are happy to advise on how to use it.

Due date: Friday, March 20, before midnight, to be submitted by email to xehu@stanford.edu.

Presentation (March 10th and 11th, in class)

Task. You will have ten minutes to tell us what you are researching, what you discovered about the topic, and how it relates to digital civil society. You may use a PowerPoint but are not required to do so. After your presentation, classmates and instructors will have 5 minutes to give comments and ask questions. The presentations are a great time to tell us about your work so far and receive feedback from your peers and all instructors.

Dates. Presentations will take place on Tuesday, **03/10** (3 people), and the rest on Wednesday, **03/11** (6 people).

Grading breakdown:

Term Paper or Project: 60%

Attendance & Participation: 40%

Students with Documented Disabilities:

Students who may need an academic accommodation based on the impact of a disability must initiate the request with the Office of Accessible Education (OAE). Professional staff will evaluate the request with required documentation, recommend reasonable accommodations, and prepare an Accommodation Letter for faculty. Unless the student has a temporary disability, Accommodation letters are issued for the entire academic year. Students should contact the OAE as soon as possible since timely notice is needed to coordinate accommodations. The OAE is located at 563 Salvatierra Walk (phone: 723-1066, URL: https://oae.stanford.edu/.

Student Hours:

Jonathan Pace. Tuesdays 4:30-6pm or by appointment. Stanford Law School, 559 Nathan Abbott Way, Office 246.

Cadence Willse. Tuesdays 4:00 - 5:00 or by appointment. Stanford Law School, 559 Nathan Abbott Way, Office 246.

Lucy Bernholz, Tuesdays 4:00 - 5:00 or by appointment, Stanford Law School, 559 Nathan Abbott Way, Office 346.

Argyri Panezi, by appointment, Stanford Law School, 559 Nathan Abbott Way, Office 246.

Toussaint Nothias (tnothias@stanford,edu), by appointment. Stanford Law School, 559 Nathan Abbott Way, Office 246.

Emily Hu. Thursday 4:00-5:00 (no set location, so please ping beforehand on slack or xehu@stanford.edu if you wish to meet). Also by appointment, and special hours/events will be held and announced throughout the quarter.

Week 1 Jan. 8 Introduction to Digital Civil Society (Lucy and Toussaint)

This class introduces the key themes and assignments of the class. We begin with students' own experiences in digital civil society, drawing from their use of digital tools for organizing, communicating, and securing information. We will introduce the numerous disciplinary approaches that inform the class, provide an overview of civil society as discussed in both Western democratic and post-colonial theories. Students will be assigned to the specific readings they will be responsible for presenting during the term and the +1 series will be introduced.

This class will also discuss the continuity of Internet history and its importance for the formation of digital civil society. While the Fall semester focused on the 1990s (see Fall Syllabus: *Making Money and Making Trouble on the 1990s Internet*), Winter quarter shifts to the 2000s: the emergence of social media platforms, the rise of mobile connectivity, institutional shifts in journalism, and major developments in intellectual property, state surveillance, and digital activism.

Read: History of Wikimedia Foundation on Wikipedia

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikimedia_Foundation (Links to an external site.)

- Critiques of the concept of civil society:
  - Nelson Kasfir (1998) "The conventional notion of civil society: A critique" (Links to an external site.), *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, 36:2, 1-20, DOI: 10.1080/14662049808447765

Optional readings:

- Nira Wickramasinghe (2005) "The Idea of Civil Society in the South: Imaginings, Transplants, Designs" pp. 458-486 https://www-jstor-org.stanford.idm.oclc.org/stable/40404268?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents

Week 2 Jan. 15 2001: 9/11 and the Patriot Act and civic space (Lucy and Toussaint)

The events of September 11, 2001 profoundly influenced the debates about digital technologies in the U.S. In this class, we'll discuss the way in which national security concerns regained political sway on issues related to digital technology, communications, and associational life. We'll also look at how civil liberties organizations, racial justice groups, and others responded to the Patriot Act and the framing of the issues.

Reading:

Adam Stone, "The Delicate Balance: Security and Privacy," IEEE Computer Society, available here [Link (Links to an external site.)](#)

Nancy Billica, Post 9/11 Philanthropy. In Files, [Week two](#)

Jason Krause, Out from the Stacks, in Files, [Week Two](#)

Optional readings:

Lisa Parks, Introduction to *[Rethinking Media Coverage: Vertical Mediation and the War on Terror (Links to an external site.)](#)* (Routledge, 2018).

Edward Said, (2005/1983) [The Essential Terrorist (Links to an external site.)](#), *The Nation.*

Barbie Zelizer. *[Journalism After 9/11 (Links to an external site.)](#)* (Routledge, 2011).

Week 3 Jan. 22 Napster and the beginning of the Copyright Wars (Argyri)

In May 2000 Judge Patel, District Judge of the United States District Court for the Northern District of California, handed in the first ruling against Napster, which was held responsible for its users' sharing of files in violation of copyright law. In February 2001, the US Court of Appeals (Ninth Circuit, in San Francisco) confirmed Napster's liability in a final case that would shape the music industry for the next decades. Napster is a landmark copyright case that marks the beginning of the so-called Copyright Wars, a period of contestation when the content industry strived to adapt to the radical changes that digital technologies brought about. This war period is arguably rooted in the history of a Western/transatlantic understanding of authorship and the protection of intellectual creations. While delving into recent copyright history, we will discuss how digital technologies challenged established business models and how a court decision (together with further developments) had a key role to play in the direction that the industry took for the next two decades.

Readings:

Langenderfer, Jeff, and Don Lloyd Cook. "Copyright policies and issues raised by A&M Records v. Napster:"The shot heard 'round the world" or "not with a bang but a whimper?"." *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing* 20, no. 2 (2001): 280-288. (accessible via Stanford libraries)

Baldwin, Peter. *The copyright wars: three centuries of trans-atlantic battle*. Princeton University Press, 2016, Chapter 8 (accessible via Stanford libraries)

Digital Millennium Copyright Act - skim through the following:

1. [EFF on the DMCA (Links to an external site.)](#)
2. [The Internet's most famous dog rater keeps disappearing from Twitter (Links to an external site.)](#)

Optional:

A&M Records, Inc. v. Napster, Inc., 114 F. Supp. 2d 896 (N.D. Cal. 2000) - available [here (Links to an external site.)](#)

A&M Records, Inc. v. Napster, Inc., 239 F.3d 1004 (9th Cir. 2001) - available [here (Links to an external site.)](#)

Menell, Peter S. "American Copyright Life: Reflections on Re-Equilibrating Copyright for the Internet Age, This." *J. Copyright Soc'y USA* 61 (2013): 235 - available [here (Links to an external site.)](#)

Week 4 Jan. 29 Organizing at scale: data, people, politics, (Lucy and Jonathan)

We look at politics and the internet as problems of organization. In the first case, how do we organize ourselves (and how do others organize us) for both civic and political action? Second, how can we understand the internet as a problem of organization and navigation, with search engines developing as solutions to those problems? In 2008, Google crawled its 1 trillionth internet page, symbolizing its unprecedented dominance. The same year saw the historical election of Barack Obama as U.S. President, following a campaign marked by sophisticated data analytics. We'll consider what these events show us about the problem of organization, the prospect of prediction, and the development of digital civil society.

"An introduction to prediction machines" (3 minute video). Available [here (Links to an external site.)](#).

"Angela Davis: Obama's Collective Victory" (6:36 minute video) Available here (Links to an external site.).

Couvering, E.V. (2008). "The history of the internet search engine: Navigational media and the traffic commodity." In Zimmer, M. & Spink, A. (Eds.), *Web Search: Multidisciplinary Perspectives.* **Berlin: Springer.**

Vaidhyanathan, S. (2011). *The Googlization of Everything (And Why We Should Worry).* Berkeley: University of California Press. Read "Render unto Ceasar: How Google came to rule the web."

Tim Harper, "Obama's Campaign a Template to Study" Toronto Star, Available in Files, Week Four, Here

Week 5 Feb. 5 2004: Mobile and social media (Toussaint)

In this session, we look at how and why, within the space of a few years, we witnessed the proliferation of social media networks and smartphones technologies that are ubiquitous today - from Facebook (2004) and Twitter (2006) to the iPhone (2007) and WhatsApp (2009). We relocate these technological innovation within their broader political and economic contexts; we question what allowed them to establish their dominant position; and we also consider their impact on politics and civic engagement on a global scale with the case study of early adopters of digital technologies in Kenya.

Reading;

-Alan Tabak (2004) 'Hundreds Register for New Facebook Website'. The *Harvard Crimson.* Available here.

-Jose Van Dijck, (2013) "Engineering Sociality in a Culture of Connectivity" In *The Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media* (Oxford University Press). Available here.

-Joshua Goldstein and Juliana Rotich (2008). "Digitally Networked Technologies in Kenya's 2007-2008 Post-Election Crisis", *Berkman Center Research Publication.* Available here.

Optional readings:

-danah boyd (2007). "Social Network Sites: Public, Private, or What?" *Knowledge* Tree 13, May. Available here.

-Alex Fattal (2012). "Facebook: Corporate Hackers, a Billion Users, and the Geo-politics of the 'Social Graph' ". *Anthropological Quarterly, 85*(3), 927-955. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/41857277

-Alice Marwick (2012) "The Public Domain: Social Surveillance in Everyday Life", *Surveillance and Society,* 9(4): *https://ojs.library.queensu.ca/index.php/surveillance-and-society/article/view/pub_dom/pub_dom*

Week 6 Feb. 12 2006: Net Neutrality debates (Argyri)

Should we treat all internet traffic equally? Why not, for example, favor fast-loading websites? Is regulation necessary or should we let the market self-regulate? For this session we will read and discuss the various answers that different stakeholders gave to the above questions. We will trace the discussion in the mid-2000s when it began, leading up to the Comcast Corp. v. FCC case and the FCC's 2010 Open Internet Order. We will also touch upon the continuation of the debate into the following decade and until today.

Readings:

2005: FCC Policy Statement (FCC 05-151)

2010: FCC Open Internet Order (FCC 10-201) [Read pp.1-32 of the PDF]

Both PDFs are uploaded on Canvas: 1. FCC-05-151A1.pdf 2. FCC-10-201A1_Rcd.pdf

Optional:

Comcast Corp. v. FCC, 600 F.3d 642 available here (Links to an external site.)

Faris, Robert, Hal Roberts, Bruce Etling, Dalia Othman, and Yochai Benkler. "The Role of the Networked Public Sphere in the US Net Neutrality Policy Debate." International Journal of Communication. 10 (2016), available here

Week 7 Feb. 19 Cadence Small donors - politics and charity E-Philanthropy and crowdfunding: indiegogo (2008), kickstarter (2009), Howard Dean and Obama

Week 8 Feb. 26 2008: Project Chanology and Anonymous (jonathan)

In 2008, a bizarre interview with Tom Cruise, produced by the Church of Scientology, was posted on YouTube. The video was received with the mockery and delight on 4chan, a dark-humored gamer community that would later become involved in far-right politics. When the Church of Scientology requested that YouTube take down the interview, 4chan users denounced the missed comedic opportunity and decided to orchestrate a distributed denial of service (DDoS) attack against the Church's website. They created a video "press release", featuring a figure in a Guy Fawkes mask, stating in a computer-generated voice, "Hello, leaders of Scientology. We are Anonymous." Hence was born the most notorious political hacker group of the 21st century, Anonymous, which would soon cut all ties with 4chan as the aughts came to a close. Why did a gamer community go through the trouble of attacking the Church of Scientology? How did Anonymous go from a trolling prank to a decentralized political movement? And how is this all related to free association, information access, and citizen-state relations as they operate in digital civil society?

Dibbel, J. (2009). "How to enrage the church of scientology." *Wired.*

Coleman, G. (2014). *Hacker, Hoaxer, Whistleblower, Spy.* Read the introduction, chapter 1, and chapter 2.

Week 9 Mar. 04 2009: Bitcoin White Paper (Jonathan)

Libertarians have long been creatures of the internet, and cryptocurrencies have long been their choice utopian technology — promising freedom from state currency, autonomy in an open market, and the prospect of a radically voluntary society. In 2009, the Bitcoin white paper was published, and it offered a simple yet powerful way to organize, distribute, and verify electronic currency without a centralized institution. Within a few years, Bitcoin was the preferred currency of dark web merchants, facilitating the anonymous movement of contraband online. By the mid-2010s, Wall Street firms were trading Bitcoin as just another speculative instrument in the global chess game of investment-yield, and civil society organizations were contemplating ways to operationalize its underlying blockchain technology for social good. What's so great about Bitcoin? Is it a utopian technology, a provisional utility, a droll investment, or something else entirely? How is it related to internet culture, state power, finance capital, and the social sector? What can its cultural, economic, and political arc teach us about digital civil society?

"Beach boy Bitcoin". (2016). *Hackernoon.* Available here (Links to an external site.).

Maurer, B., Nelms, T., Swarz, L. (2013). "'When perhaps the real problem is money itself': The practical materiality of Bitcoin". *Social Semiotics 23*(2): 261-277.

Herian, R. (2016). "Anything but disruptive: Blockchain, capital, and and a case of fourth industrial age enclosure". *Critical Legal Thinking.*

Week 10 Mar. 11 Students final presentations of papers and projects.

MILESTONES AND ASSIGNEMENT TIMELINE

	W.1	W.2	W. 3	W. 4	W. 5	W. 6	W. 7	W. 8	W. 9	W. 10	Friday 20 March
Participation & attendance					Throughout						
Final paper / project			Share with the teaching team 1 to 3 possible topics.	Mentor(s) assigned and first meeting (during +1).			Meeting with mentor (s) (during +1)		Meeting with mentor (arrange time with mentor)	In-class presentation.	Final paper due.