

# Digital Civil Society

COMM 230A / CSRE 230A

WAYS-SI (Social Inquiry), WAYS -EDP (Exploring Difference and Power)

Meeting time: Wednesdays, 10:30 AM – 1:20 PM (PST Time)

Location: [300-303](#)



## Course description

A vibrant civil society is a core component of democratic life. 'Civil society' includes social movements, philanthropists, unions, nonprofits, NGOs, charities, informal associational life, individual activism, and cooperatives, among others. In this course, students interrogate how civil society is evolving in a world of pervasive digitization and data collection.

The class takes a global perspective and historical approach. The spirit of the class is both critical and generative. We are dividing the class into three "clusters" of topics: Elections, Culture and Community, and Company Towns. Within each cluster we will examine power and inequalities, public participation, the dynamics of civil society actors and the impact of digital dependencies on our abilities to assemble and associate. Within these clusters we will consider topics such as: tech workers unionizing, digital ID systems, disinformation, voting and democracy in digital times, the human labor behind content moderation, digitization's effects on intellectual property and creativity, and community efforts to shift corporate and/or government power. We will have guest speakers joining the class throughout the quarter to share their research on digital civil society or their first hand experience working in digital civil society.

The course is global in scope (we will read authors and study cases from North America, Europe, Asia, and Africa), taught by a multidisciplinary team, and is committed to a syllabus inclusive of the scholarship, knowledge, and voices of marginalized communities. There are no requirements to enroll in this class, and we welcome students from all disciplinary backgrounds. Class enrollment is limited to 30 students.

## Quarter overview

*(see the end of the syllabus for a full description of each session and readings)*

- [Week 1 - Introduction to digital civil society](#)
- [Week 2 - Retrospective look at civil society and elections](#)
- [Week 3 - Today's elections and digital opportunities](#)
- [Week 4 - Digital civil society, elections and the future of democracy](#)
- [Week 5 - "Culture" and "community" in the analog age](#)
- [Week 6 - Free labor, free culture, open everything](#)
- [Week 7 - Can AI create culture?](#)
- [Week 8 - Corporations, urban development, and civic engagement](#)
- [Week 9 - Big Tech building big cities?](#)
- [Week 10 - Digital civil society goes to outer space and conclusion](#)

## Learning outcomes

After completing the course, students will be able to:

- Describe the scope of the concept of civil society, and discuss its usefulness and limitations;
- Define different constraints posed on civil society by technological designs, law, policy and social norms.
- Be able to adopt a historical view of digital technologies to contextualize current debates about technology and society
- Understand how social identities shape and are shaped by digital technologies
- Articulate how inequalities and power imbalance shaping digital ecosystems and associational life across the world
- Summarize different approaches to these issues taken by scholars across disciplines including historians, media and communication scholars, legal scholars, and political scientists.
- Conduct independent and interdisciplinary scholarship, and effectively use various types of digital archives.
- Apply theoretical concepts to practical applications and present ideas relevant to the application of the class themes to the real world.

## Teaching team and office hours

### Instructors

- [Lucy Bernholz \(bernholz@stanford.edu\)](mailto:bernholz@stanford.edu)
  - Office hours: by appointment only - use email to set up
  - Zoom details: <https://stanford.zoom.us/my/lucybernholz>
- Anushah Hossain ([ahossain@stanford.edu](mailto:ahossain@stanford.edu))
  - Office hours: Fridays 10-11:30am
  - Sign up on Calendly [here](#)
- Karina Rider ([Karina19@stanford.edu](mailto:Karina19@stanford.edu))
  - Office hours: Tuesdays 10-11:30am
  - Zoom details: <https://stanford.zoom.us/my/karinarider>, PW: 799274
    - Join anytime; there will be a waiting room, and I will admit you in the order folks show up

### Teaching Assistant

- Daniela Uribe ([duribe21@stanford.edu](mailto:duribe21@stanford.edu))
  - Office hours: Thursdays 12:30-2pm
  - [Zoom link here](#), PW: 627124
    - Feel free to join the waiting room, and I will admit you as soon as I'm done helping other students.

*Office hours are opportunities to discuss course material, queries, concerns, and other issues related to your academic success. Feel free to join even if you don't have any questions; conversation can be a lovely gateway to meaningful insight.*

## Required material and teaching platform

This online syllabus will be your primary source of information for the class. It contains hyperlinks to the readings, information about assignments, office hours and more. This is a live document, which is routinely updated by the teaching team. Please bookmark it on your browser!

In conjunction with this live syllabus, we will also use Canvas. You will submit your assignments via Canvas; and the teaching team will use canvas to send announcements to the class. Reading responses will be submitted in-person and the response grades will be displayed on Canvas.

## Assignments

### *Grading breakdown*

The class can be taken for a letter grade or credit/no credit. There are 5 graded components for this class:

Attendance, participation, and reading responses	40%
ELI5 Elections assignment	20%
Wayback Machine assignment	20%
Company Town assignment	20%

### **Attendance, participation and reading responses**

Attendance and participation are core components of your experience in the class. We expect you to come prepared by having done the readings (approximately 60 pages per week). The course will provide multiple ways of engaging including partner work, small group discussions, mock debates and more. We assess your engagement with the materials through how you discuss the readings in class, and your involvement during the in-class activities. We also consider your ability to engage others in conversation by asking them questions. Finally, we also take into account your participation and engagement during office hours with the instructor.

Starting week 2, we will take 15 minutes at the end of each class for you to submit a reading response (via Canvas). The teaching team will provide a prompt question.

Students who need to miss a class should let their instructor liaison know in advance and are still responsible for submitting the reading response prior to the following class.

## ELI5: Elections Edition

In this assignment you will flex your advocacy, engineering (social and technological) and analytic muscles. In pairs, you will pick a jurisdiction (Local, Regional, National) and first create a schematic of their voting process, identifying digital elements. Then, write a short proposal for what your definition of improvement would be (more inclusive, less burdensome, more secure, etc), what kinds of improvements you think could be made, what each change would accomplish, and what, if any, digital elements are part of your proposal. If there are digital components, explain whether there are existing solutions or if they'd need to be developed. Finally, explain the role(s) that civil society would need to play in getting these changes implemented. In the 3rd class (January 31, 2024) of this cluster each pair will get 5 minutes to present their situation and proposed solution and ask for feedback from class on one question per pair. Pairs working on similar topics (and that choose to) may join together after this class.

The goal is to identify a problem with current election systems and propose an improvement - and Explain it Like I was Five (ELI5) - in other words, make it simple and motivational. You can choose the jurisdiction (local, regional, national) and the voting system you wish to focus on. You must then prepare a presentation that explains the following:

- What system are you focusing on and to whom are you addressing your materials?
- What problem are you trying to fix? And why? For example, if you wish to expand voter participation rates you must explain what democratic values the improvement aligns with and counter arguments that are made against it (e.g., preventing election fraud.)
- What is the solution you're advocating for? How would it work, who do you need to get to support the change, what roles will civil society have in the change?
- If it is a technological change, how will you get it implemented? If it is a social or policy change, how will you get it implemented?

You may present this final joint project in one of a number of forms. It could be a written proposal (Max 5 pages) intended for local election administrators, a slide deck with notes intended for software developers, a set of talking points that community members might present at a government body hearing, or any combination of materials that might be used to persuade the public. Your materials should specify which audience you are focused on.

Base your analysis on evidence and make clear when you are referencing an outside source or providing your own assessment. Include at least three external sources to justify your proposal. This can be a mix of contemporary commentary (e.g. from a magazine, newspaper, nonprofit report, or popular blog), scholarly articles, or something else.

## RUBRIC

### *Due dates:*

- Feedback session and questions: *In class on Week 4* Jan 31, 2024
- Final assignment: *By midnight, Week 5* Feb 7, 2024

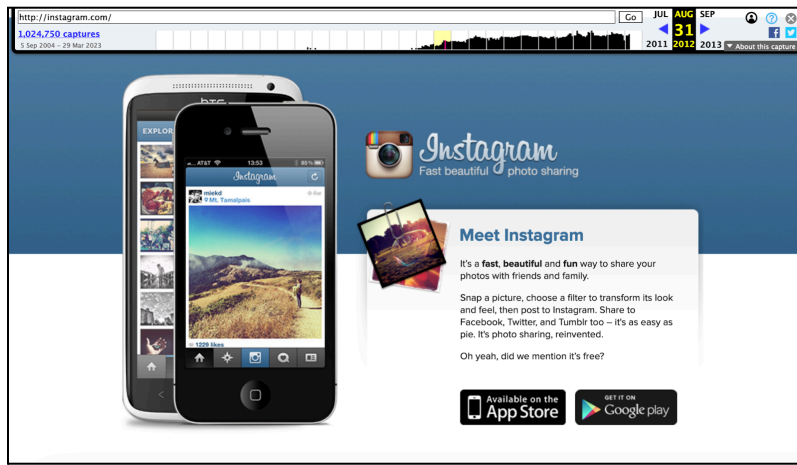
### *Grading criteria:*

- Submitted on time: 1 point
- Explains the problem/solution in simple terms: 5 points.
- Describes the roles /responsibilities for civil society: 5 points.
- References at least three sources: 3 points.
- Quality of writing: 3 points.
- Overall creativity and depth of analysis: 3 points.

## Wayback Machine assignment

This assignment will give you a chance to dig into how technologies are shaping cultural production on a minute scale. You'll be trawling through archives – specifically, the Internet Archive's [Wayback Machine](#) – to piece together your own history of one or more web pages.

First, find a virtual community or cultural page (e.g. a magazine, newspaper, or media site). Click through snapshots of your site using the Wayback Machine – these will be your primary sources – and prepare a 1500-2000 word reflection that addresses the following:



- 1) What narrative of the site emerges from the records contained in the Wayback Machine? What do you see changing and what stays still?
- 2) How do you see the nature of the web, and society more broadly, changing from these snapshots? What ideas from our course readings, if any, are reflected in the snapshots?
- 3) What information is missing from the archives? Consider content, but also structural aspects such as images, dead links, formatting, or page redirects. All of it is interesting.
- 4) What role do you think the Wayback Machine will play in the work of future historians? Does having records of the internet in this form inspire excitement or trepidation (or something else entirely!)?

Include at least three snapshots of your site with your response.



## RUBRIC

*Due date: End of week 7 (Sunday, Feb 25, 2024 midnight, PST)*

### *Grading criteria:*

- |  |           |
|--|-----------|
| · Submitted on time:                         | 2 points. |
| · Includes at least three website snapshots: | 2 points. |
| · Addresses Q1:                              | 4 points. |
| · Addresses Q2:                              | 4 points. |
| · Addresses Q3:                              | 3 points. |
| · Addresses Q4:                              | 3 points. |
| · Quality and creativity of write-up:        | 2 points. |

## Company Town assignment: Civil Society Contesting Company Towns (Due March 17, midnight PST)

This assignment asks you to think about how civil society organizations are responding to Google's plan to build a new campus in downtown San Jose, California. The goal is to help you think through how different grassroots organizations define social problems, propose solutions, and hold tech firms and local governments responsible for solving different aspects of the problem. Each organization has its own set of concerns with the project as well as proposed solutions. Some of these overlap, but many of them conflict.

In a short paper, you'll compare and contrast two organizations' approaches to shaping the Google campus project: Working Partnerships USA (and their initiative Silicon Valley Rising) and SPUR (The San Francisco Bay Area Planning and Urban Research Association). You'll be exploring how the organizations understand the Google campus project very differently, and reflecting on which organization, in your opinion, resonates with your point of view.

Below, you'll find selected readings and resources for each organization (although you're welcome to do additional research on your own) and questions to address in the paper.

### Readings:

Working Partnerships USA/Silicon Valley Rising:

- ["Envisioning Community"](#), a report on the organization's demands for the campus
- ["The Google Rent Hike"](#), a report on the impact of the campus on rental housing

SPUR:

- ["What SPUR Wants from San Jose-Google Deal"](#) (paywalled; you can log in with your Stanford email account)
- ["Rethinking the Corporate Campus"](#), a report from before the Google campus announcement that lays out the organization's demands for tech corporate campus development
- ["Seven Ideas for Downtown San Jose"](#)

### Assignment questions:

1. **Defining problems.** What problem are the organizations trying to solve?
  - Is the campus causing a problem, fixing one, or both?
  - What exactly is causing the problem?
  - Who is impacted by the problem?
2. **Proposing solutions.** How should the problem be fixed?
  - What solutions do they propose? Why would the solutions work?
  - Who benefits from these solutions?
  - Who is responsible for implementing the solutions?
3. **Reflection.** Is there one organization that you feel has a more compelling argument? Why?

## RUBRIC

*Due date: End of week 10 (Sunday, Mar 17, 2024 midnight, PST)*

### *Grading criteria:*

- |   |           |
|---|-----------|
| · Submitted on time:                    | 1 point.  |
| · Addresses Q1:                         | 6 points. |
| · Addresses Q2:                         | 6 points. |
| · Addresses Q3:                         | 3 points. |
| · Quality of comparing and contrasting: | 4 points. |

## Weekly overview and readings

### **Week 1 - Introduction to digital civil society.**

**Jan 10, 2024**

We begin with an introduction to the idea of civil society and its roles in democracies. Using the U.S. as an example, we'll critique both political theory and history to frame potential purposes of civil society. Drawing from economic theory, we'll consider how our dependence on digital systems shifts power, creates new opportunities, and requires new organizational structures, laws, and practices to maintain digital civil society. Finally, we'll collectively generate and consider a list of values, concerns, and concepts particular to how civil society functions in the digital age.

Prompt questions: Reflect on your own experiences participating in or leading some form of collective effort at change. What digital tools were used (e.g. mobile phones, shared documents, GPS, email, etc.) and how did you and your group think about the data trails you were creating?

#### **Read:**

- Hintz, Dencik, Wall-Jorgenson, "Challenging Datafication". In *Digital Citizenship in a Datafied Society*, Polity Press, 2018, pp 123-143. [Link](#).
- Bernholz, Lucy. *Blueprint 2023*. Digital Civil Society Lab, Stanford University. Pp 12-13 [Link](#)
- Johana Bhuiyan, "Muslims reel over a prayer app that sold user data". *LA Times*, 23 November 2020. [Link](#)

### **Week 2 - Retrospective look at civil society and elections Jan 17, 2024**

Civil society is deeply involved with elections, and elections are generally seen as core to democracies. In this cluster of three classes we will look at the past, present and future of elections in democracies and the various roles that civil society plays. We will begin with a presentation on the history of (analog and digital) technologies in elections while also considering how a jurisdiction's laws about voting shape civil society (and vice versa). We will be joined by Katie Harbath, former head of elections at Facebook, and currently a member of the Integrity Institute.

Introduction to ELI5 Election assignment; due on February 7, 2024.

**Guest Speaker:** Katie Harbath, former Facebook head of elections

#### **Read:**

- Heller, Nathan. "Estonia, the Digital Republic." *The New Yorker*. December 25, 2017. [Link](#)
- Harbath, Katie and Collier Fernekes. "A Brief History of Tech and Elections: A 26-Year Journey." *Bipartisan Policy Center*. September 28, 2022. [Link](#).

- “Voter ID Laws.” *National Center of State Legislatures*. [Link](#).
- Kolbert, Elizabeth. “Ratf\*\*cked’: The Influence of Redistricting.” *The New Yorker*. June 20, 2016. [Link](#).
- Wu, Peter Y. and Diane A. Igoche. “GIS for Democracy: Toward A Solution Against Gerrymandering.” *Journal of Information Systems Applied Research*. July 2022. [Link](#).
- Massoglia, Anna and Karl Evers-Hillstrom. “‘Dark Money’ topped \$1 billion in 2020, largely boosting Democrats.” *Open Secrets*. March 17, 2021. [Link](#).

**Explore:**

- “Can You Gerrymander Your Party to Power?” *New York Times*. [Link](#).
- *REDMAP: The Redistricting Majority Project*. [Link](#).

**Optional readings:**

- Anderson, Carol. [One Person, No Vote](#). 2018.

## **Week 3 - Today's elections and digital opportunities**

**Jan 24, 2024**

In this session we will identify where digital dependencies currently exist in elections - both within and around actual voting systems. We will collectively diagram a system [schematic](#) to help you think through these issues for your paired assignment. We will also discuss several contemporary proposals for either improving the voting process or reshaping democracy to get rid of voting, and civil society's roles in these proposals. One reform for current voting systems focuses on countering proprietary “black box” systems with open source software. Our guests are two local proponents in the movement for open source election software.

**Guest speakers:** Chris Jerdonek, former SF Elections Commissioner, and Matt Roe, [Voting Works](#)

**Read:**

- Paulin, Alois. “An Overview of Ten Years of Liquid Democracy Research.” *dg.o '20: The 21st Annual International Conference on Digital Government Research*. June 2020. [Link](#).
- Shehabi, Ala'a and Muzna Al-Masri. “Foregrounding citizen imaginaries: Exploring just energy futures through a citizens' assembly in Lebanon.” *Futures*. June 2022. [Link](#).
- Bernholz, Lucy and Toussaint Nothias. “Can Free Assembly Survive the Internet?” *Public Books*. March 3, 2021. [Link](#).
- Bader, Max. “Disinformation in Elections.” *Security and Human Rights*. December 12, 2018. [Link](#).
  - Or Solon, Olivia. “Trolls in Slovakian Election Tap AI Deepfakes to Spread Disinfo.” *Bloomberg Technology*. September 29, 2023. [Link](#).

**Watch:**

- “Texting, Texting: The Effect of Text Messages On Voting, Volunteering, and Giving.” *Center for Governance and Markets* - watch the first 28 minutes (Up to the Q&A). [Link](#).

## **Week 4 - Digital civil society, elections, and the future of democracy Jan 31, 2023**

In this class we will discuss several proposals for improving democracy that build from the existing digital capacities, including AI. We will then meet a team from the D. School's team that has been working on election administration. We will have the opportunity to experience and reflect on several of their design recommendations. We will allocate time for each paired group to share with the class their paired proposal for election improvement. Each group should come prepared to summarize their work in 5 minutes including asking for feedback on one question. The ELI5 assignments are due midnight after the following class.

**Guest speakers:** Nadia Roumani and D.School elections team

### **Read:**

- Heller, Nathan. “Politics Without Politicians.” *The New Yorker*. February 19, 2020. [Link](#).
- Ford, Bryan. “Identity and Personhood in Digital Democracy: Evaluating Inclusion, Equality, Security, and Privacy in Pseudonym Parties and Other Proofs of Personhood.” 2020. [Link](#).
- Lalley, Steven P. and E. Glen Weyl. “Quadratic Voting : How Mechanism Design Can Radicalize Democracy.” *AEA Papers and Proceedings*. May 2018. [Link](#).
- Commission on the Practice of Democratic Citizenship. “Our Common Purpose: Reinventing American Democracy for the 21st Century.” *American Academy of Arts and Sciences*. June 2020. [Link](#).
- Ovadya, Aviv. “Reimagining Democracy for AI.” *Journal of Democracy*. October 2023. [Link](#).
- Kreps, Sarah and Doug Kriner. “How AI Threatens Democracy.” *Journal of Democracy*. October 2023. [Link](#).

## **Week 5 - “Culture” and “Community” in the analog age**

**Feb 7, 2024**

Before there were fiber optic cables, Facebook, or DALL-E, we had telephones, cable TV, and magazines. This unit takes on the rather amorphous concepts of “culture” and “community” and their intersection with digital technologies. Over the next three weeks, we’ll grapple with questions of sociality, or how groups organize and build ties with each other; artistic production and ownership; and information access and stewardship. How has the advent of various technologies changed the responses to these questions?

By the end of these sessions, students will be able to think through different models for the relationship between technology and society (from the social construction of technology to technological determinism) and articulate the cases for and against content preservation, volunteer labor, and copyright in digital spaces.

This first session takes us through the 20th century with a few case studies. We begin with the telephone and the television and think through how they enabled the formation of new rituals and communities. Then we read about several visions of the upcoming digital future. How would society change if we could store records of every piece of information, if art could be infinitely and inexpensively reproduced, if individuals gained the ability to find their own communities based on affinity, rather than geographic proximity?

**Read:**

- Fischer, Claude S. Chapter 8 from *America Calling: A Social History of the Telephone*, 1994. [Link](#).
- McLuhan, Marshall. "Chapter 31 - Television: The Timid Giant," from *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, 1964. [Link](#).
- Interview snippets from Walter Benjamin & Andy Warhol, *Lapham's Quarterly*. [Link](#).
- Bush, Vannevar. "As We May Think." *The Atlantic*. July 1945. [Link](#). **Pay close attention from Section 6 onward.**

NB: These are hard readings! Give them a skim and do your best to get acquainted with the core ideas. We will delve into them together in class.

**Optional:**

Learn more about Benjamin's ideas: "[The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction](#)"

Learn more about Warhol: "[What is Andy Warhol's Factory?](#)" *The Collector*. July 12, 2023.

[ELI5 Election Assignment](#) due February 7, 2024.

**Week 6 - Free labor, free culture, open everything**

**Feb 14, 2024**

We move next into the new millennium, when many of the inventions that could previously only be imagined have now been realized. Our readings take us through the promises and the realities of the open source and open access movements that exploded after the birth of personal computing and the internet. What does it mean for information to be free? Is it to your benefit or harm to get to work for free with others on whatever project you choose? Is there a cost to saving *everything* online?

**Read:**

- Shirky, Clay. Chapter 2 from *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing without Organizations*. 2008. [Link](#).
- **Read the preface & intro, skim the rest if interested:** Eghbal, Nadia, "Roads and Bridges: The Unseen Labor Behind our Digital Infrastructure" *Ford Foundation*. 2016. [Link](#).
- **Do your best on this one, skimming is okay:** Terranova, Tiziana. "Free Labor: Producing culture for the digital economy." *Social Text*. Summer 2000. [Link](#).
- Ogden, Jessica. "'Everything on the internet can be saved': Archive Team, Tumblr and the cultural significance of web archiving" *Internet Histories*. October 2021. [Link](#).

Optional Field trip - Friday, February 16, 2024 at the Internet Archive (300 Funston Avenue, San Francisco)

## Week 7 - Can AI create culture?

Feb 21, 2024

In the final session in this unit, we try to glimpse the future by looking closely at the present. What is the future of virtual communities? What meaning does the blockchain-powered Fediverse mean to someone in China's countryside? What happens to our virtual avatars after our death, and to our content after we leave Facebook?

In the realm of cultural production, we look at simultaneous openings and closures. ChatGPT and DALL-E are powering totally new forms of art and writing, but who benefits and who gets exploited? Is there a risk to sharing your work? And what is "fair use" anyway? We take stock of these ongoing debates as they pertain to digital archives, generative AI, and the recent writers' strike in the US.

**Guest speaker:** Ian M. White, member of Screen Actors Guild (SAG)

### Read:

- Wang, Xiaowei "Chapter 2: On a Blockchain Chicken Farm in the Middle of Nowhere," *Blockchain Chicken Farm*. October 2020. [Link](#).
- [New York Times Sues OpenAI and Microsoft Over Use of Copyrighted Work](#)
  - OpenAI's [blog post response](#)
- Deck, Andrew. "[The AI workers at the frontlines of the AI revolution](#)" *Rest of World*. July 2023.
- Szynol, Paul. "[The Andy Warhol Case That Could Wreck American Art](#)" *The Atlantic*. October 1, 2022.
- Bedingfield, Will. "[Hollywood Writers Reached an AI Deal That Will Rewrite History](#)" *Wired*. September 27, 2023

### Optional:

- Electronic Frontier Foundation, "[Hachette vs. Internet Archive](#)."
- NY Times complaint, see examples on pg 29 [here](#)



- Skim "[Summary of the 2023 WGA MBA.](#)"

[Wayback Machine Assignment](#) due on Sunday, February 25, 2024

## **Week 8 - Corporations, urban development, and civic engagement Feb 28, 2024**

One of the most important factors shaping civic society is the built environment—even more so prior to the internet. How far away is city hall? Or your neighbors? Are you able to gather in places where you can freely express your political beliefs, or are you heavily policed? The availability and accessibility of places to congregate and organize are crucial for maintaining robust civic activity.

The situation can become more complicated if the town is built and run by a single company, where all residents work. How “free” are these “public” spaces? What kinds of criticisms can you make—and of whom, or what? If you have a complaint, can you lodge it with “city government,” or does it go to the corporation? Does this complaint jeopardize your livelihood? These are questions we will return to throughout this unit.

This week, we’re going to investigate some historical examples of company towns. These cases will be crucial for comparison when we start analyzing contemporary examples, where digital technologies are in the mix.

### **Required readings**

#### **Case #1: Celebration, Florida:**

##### **Read:**

- “When You Wish Upon a House.” New York Times. [Link](#).
- “Town Building Is No Mickey Mouse Operation.” New York Times. [Link](#).
- Ross, Andrew. 2000. *The Celebration Chronicles: Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Property Value in Disney’s New Town*. Ballantine Books. Chapter 5: “Our Much-Rumored Life” [\[Link\]](#) and Chapter 10: “Kinder, Gentler Government?” [\[Link\]](#)

##### **Watch:**

- Walt Disney’s official reveal of EPCOT plans in 1966. [Link](#).

##### **Explore:**

- Walking tour of Celebration, Florida today [skim]. [Link](#).

#### **Case #2: Fordlandia, Brazil:**

##### **Read:**

- Grandin, Greg. 2010. *Fordlandia: The Rise and Fall of Henry Ford’s Forgotten Jungle City*. Picador. Chapter 15: “Kill All the Americans” [\[Link\]](#). Chapter 17: “Good Lines, Straight and True” [\[Link\]](#). Chapter 18: “Mountains of the Moon” [\[Link\]](#).

**Listen:**

- 99% Invisible podcast. "Fordlandia." [Link](#).

**Explore:**

- Historic images of Fordlandia by Katie Canales, Business Insider. [Link](#)
- Images of Fordlandia today by Bryan Denton, photojournalist. [Link](#)

**Week 9 - Big Tech building big cities?****Mar 6, 2024**

This week, we'll build on our knowledge of historical company towns to explore what happens when these towns are developed by tech companies. We'll talk about two contemporary cases: (1) Google's failed attempt to build a smart city in Toronto; (2) Foxconn's enclosed city in Longhua Science and Technology Park, Shenzhen, China. How do these urban plans shape civil society? And how does civil society contest their urban design? What differences do digital technologies make? We'll be comparing these two cases to last week's lesson on Celebration and Fordlandia, to identify what differences digital technologies make in our cities.

**Guest speaker:** Jeffrey Buchanan of Working Partnerships USA

**Required readings****Case #1: Sidewalk Labs in Toronto****Read:**

- "A City Is Not a Computer." Pp. 51-72 in *A City Is Not a Computer: Other Urban Intelligences* by Shannon Mattern. Princeton University Press. [Link](#).
- Ellen P. Goodman and Julia Powles. 2019. "Urbanism Under Google: Lessons from Sidewalk Toronto." *Fordham Law Review*. [Link](#).

**Listen:**

- "Why Google's Toronto Smart City Failed." *Tech Won't Save Us* Podcast. [Link](#).

**Case #2: Foxconn in Shenzhen:****Read:**

- Jenny Chan, Pun Ngai, and Mark Selden. 2020. [Dying for an iPhone: Apple, Foxconn, and the Lives of China's Workers](#). Preface [\[Link\]](#), Chapter 7: "Wandering the City" [\[Link\]](#) and Chapter 9: "Confronting Environmental Crisis" [\[Link\]](#).

**Watch:**

- *Complicit*, a documentary about one Foxconn worker's fight to expose the dangerous working conditions in China's smartphone factories. [Link](#).

**Week 10 - Digital civil society goes to outer space and conclusion** **Mar 13, 2024**

This week, we'll be looking to the future of tech & cities by looking to the solar system. How do tech companies think about space travel? Who gets to go? What kind of government will these

colonies have? And who gets to decide what these expeditions will look like? Meanwhile, as tech companies like SpaceX look to the stars, they are having more immediate, terrestrial impacts, such as in the town of Brownsville, Texas.

### Case #1: SpaceX in Brownsville, Texas

#### Read:

- “Elon Musk’s SpaceX Is Buying Up a Texas Village. Homeowners Cry Foul.” Wall Street Journal. [Link](#).
- “Humanity’s Future or an Unwelcome Interloper: SpaceX’s Starbase Transforms a Corner of Texas.” Wall Street Journal. [Link](#).
- “Housing Costs Skyrocket as SpaceX Expands in Texas City.” NPR. [Link](#).
- “Fuera SpaceX! Imagining New STEM Futures in Latinx Communities.” Latinx Talk. [Link](#).
- A tale of three murals:
  - “Welcome to Brownsville” [Link](#)
  - “BTX” and “Uncle Elon” [Link](#)

#### Watch:

- “When Elon Musk Is Building Two Old-Fashioned Company Towns in Texas.” Wall Street Journal. [Link](#).

#### Explore:

- City of Brownsville’s website [Link](#) and their page on SpaceX [Link](#)

### Case #2: Outer space

#### Read:

- Rubenstein, Mary-Jane. 2022. “Whose Space Is It?” pp. 95-118 in *Astrotopia: The Dangerous Religion of the Corporate Space Race*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. [Link](#).

#### Listen:

- “The Dangerous Religion of the Corporate Space Race.” Tech Won’t Save Us podcast. [Link](#).