Once upon a time, science and technology were seen as emancipatory and empowering – as forces for good in the steady march of human progress. Nowadays, not so much. In this age of hurricanes and twitterstorms, even the steam engine or the telegraph can appear retrospectively as harbingers of global calamity. But we can no more wish these developments away than we can turn back the clock; we are left weighing the benefits and damages they have wrought, with an eye to the possibilities they create or foreclose. In this course, we will discuss recent scholarship on the politics of biology, digitality, and carbon.

This being a reading- and writing-intensive course, the first requirement is that you come to class having done the reading carefully and willing to discuss it. Please make sure to bring the books to class.

This is a seminar-style course, of the kind that both requires and rewards careful reading and active participation. To facilitate our discussions, we will rely on the guidance of few students each time. These students will have prepared written remarks to be distributed at the start of each class and will be responsible for guiding the discussion that day.

There will be four assignments for this course: three review essays and one podcast. Each review essay will combine three books and will be no longer than 2,000 words. We will look at the journal Public Books for possible models. Details about the podcast assignment will be given later in the term. Each assignment accounts for 20% of your grade, with class participation accounting for the remaining 20%.

Please note that attendance is mandatory. You are allowed two unexcused absences over the course of the semester. You are also expected to meet with the instructor in office hours at least once over the course of the semester, as well as with the teaching assistant.

Books for purchase

The following books are on order at UWM’s so-called “bookstore.” You could also purchase them from a local, brick and mortar bookstore (e.g. Boswell Books on Downer, Woodland Pattern in Riverwest). (You may want to avoid buying all the books at once, lest there be a change in the syllabus.)

5. Taina Bucher, *If... Then: Algorithmic Power and Politics* (Oxford University Press, 2018)
6. Grant Kien, *Communicating With Memes* (Lexington, 2019). [Very expensive; hold off on this one.]

**Time commitment**

This course should require a total time commitment of approximately ten hours per week. Of this, students will spent two hours and thirty minutes in class; they will spend the remaining time engaged in reading, thinking, and writing.

**UWM Policies and Procedures**

In this course, we will abide by the UWM policies and procedures as described in the following document: [http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/SecU/SyllabusLinks.pdf](http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/SecU/SyllabusLinks.pdf)

**Students with disabilities**

Students with disabilities should notify the instructor immediately so that we can make appropriate accommodations. We will follow university procedures as described in the following document: [http://www4.uwm.edu/sac/SACltr.pdf](http://www4.uwm.edu/sac/SACltr.pdf)

**Religious observances**

Students who plan to observe religious holidays should notify the instructor immediately so that we can make appropriate accommodations. We will follow university procedures as described in the following document: [http://www4.uwm.edu/secu/docs/other/S1.5.htm](http://www4.uwm.edu/secu/docs/other/S1.5.htm)

**Students called to active military duty**

Students who are called to active military duty should notify the instructor immediately so that we can make appropriate accommodations. We will follow university procedures as described in the following document: [http://www4.uwm.edu/current_students/military_call_up.cfm](http://www4.uwm.edu/current_students/military_call_up.cfm)
Schedule of Readings  
(as of 2/22/20)

Part I. Biology

Week 1. 22 January. Introduction


Week 2. 27-29 January. Can Science Make Sense of Life?

Sheila Jasanoff, Can Science Make Sense of Life  
Chapters 1-3  
Chapters 4-7  
(Students from groups 1 and 2 presenting)

Week 3. 3-5 February. The Social Life of DNA

Alondra Nelson, The Social Life of DNA: Race, Reparations and Reconciliation after the Genome  
Preface, Introduction, Chapters 1-4  
Chapters 5-9  
(Students from groups 3 and 4 presenting)

Week 4. 10-12 February. Native American DNA

Kim Tallbear, Native American DNA: Tribal Belonging and the False Promise of Genetic Science  
Introduction, Chapters 1-2  
Chapters 3-4 and Conclusion  
(Students from groups 5 and 6 presenting)

Week 5. 17-19 February Paper Writing

Film: The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks  
19 February: First paper due

Part II. Digitality

Week 6. 24-26 February Weapons of Math Destruction

Cathy O’Neil, Weapons of Mass Destruction: How Big Data Increases Inequality and Threatens Democracy  
Introduction, Chapters 1-4  
Chapters 5-10, Conclusion  
(Students from groups 1 and 2 presenting)
Week 7. 2-4 March Algorithmic Power and Politics

Taina Bucher, *If... Then: Algorithmic Power and Politics*

(Students from groups 3 and 4 presenting)

Week 8. 9-11 March Communicating with Memes

Grant Kien, Communicating with Memes

(Students from groups 5 and 6 presenting)

Week 9. 16-18 March No Class (Spring Recess)

Week 10. 23-25 March

*Film TBD*

*25 March: Second Paper due*

Part III. Carbon

Week 11. 30 Mar-1 Apr Carbon Democracy

Timothy Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil*

(Students from groups 1 and 2 presenting)

Week 12. 6-8 April Fossil Capital (1)

Andreas Malm, *Fossil Capital: The Rise of Steam Power and the Roots of Global Warming*

(Students from groups 3 and 4 presenting)

Week 13. 13-15 April Fossil Capital (2)

Andreas Malm, *Fossil Capital: The Rise of Steam Power and the Roots of Global Warming*

Week 14. 20-22 April Slow Violence

Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*

(Students from groups 5 and 6 presenting)

Week 15. 27-29 April

Film TBD

*29 April Third paper due*

Week 16. 4-6 May Podcasts – draft due