University of Wisconsin-Madison  
Department of History  
Semester I, 1988-89

History 901  Prof. Dunlavy

READINGS IN THE HISTORY OF AMERICAN TECHNOLOGY

This seminar is intended to acquaint students with the major issues that have occupied historians of technology in recent years and to provide an introduction to recent research. The emphasis is not on the "nuts and bolts" of American technology development; students pursuing their own research in the history of technology, as a rule, acquire the necessary "hardware" knowledge on their own. Instead, we will focus a) on the forces that have shaped the direction of technological change in the 19th and 20th centuries and b) on the socio-political consequences of technological change.

As a secondary goal, the seminar is designed to hone analytical skills. The weekly reading load has been kept to a minimum for two reasons. First, most of the assigned readings consist of essays or chapters from larger works rather than entire books, and making sense of this kind of reading necessarily demands more of the reader. Second, all students will be required to make sense of the readings--by writing a brief analysis of the readings each week (more below). You should therefore expect to do all of the assigned reading each week, to give it a close reading, and then to spend some time pulling together a succinct but comprehensive evaluation.

Course Requirements. Each student will be required to lead class discussion once during the semester, and all students will be required to write a brief analysis of the assigned readings each week (ca. two pages, double-spaced). These are due at the beginning of each seminar and will be graded on a "satisfactory plus/minus" scale. Course grades will be based on: leadership of class discussion (25%), weekly analyses (50%), and seminar participation (25%).

Reading Materials. Most of the reading material is contained in a reading packet that may be purchased at Kinko's on University Avenue; a copy will also be put on reserve at the Historical Society. The following books are available for purchase at the University Bookstore.

David Hounshell, From the American System to Mass Production (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984).


SEMINAR TOPICS AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

September 8. Introduction

September 15. Conceptual Aids: Technology, Industrialization, Capitalism, the State ...


David S. Landes, Prometheus Unbound: Technological Change and Industrial Development in Western Europe from 1750 to the Present (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), pp. 1-40 (Ch. 1, "Introduction").


September 22. What is the History of Technology?


September 29. Antebellum Mechanization: Saving Labor or Saving Capital?


Hounshell, From the American System to Mass Production, pp. 189-261 (Chs. 5-6).


October 20. Managerial Hierarchies: The "What-Do-Bosses-Do" Debate.


October 27. The Science-Technology Relationship: A Debate Worth Reviving?


November 3. From Mechanics to . . . Engineers? Managers? Technocrats?


(continued on next page)
November 3. From Mechanics to . . . (continued).

Technology and Culture 27 (October 1986): 694-716.

Peter Meiksins, "The 'Revolt of the Engineers' Reconsidered," 

Donald Stabile, Prophets of Order: The Rise of the New Class, 
Technocracy and Socialism in America (Boston: South End Press, 1984), 
pp. 1-56 (Introduction and Chs. 1-2).

November 10. Labor's Power and Technological Change.


November 17. Mass Production: Inherent Limits and Historical Alternatives?

Hounshell, From the American System to Mass Production, pp. 263-330 (Chs. 7-8).


(continued next page)
November 17. Inherent Limits and Historical Alternatives, continued.


Kasson, *Civilizing the Machine*, pp. 3-180 (Chs. 1-4).


December 8. Technology and the Political Sphere: The View from Both Sides.


December 15. Progress For Whom?