HIST265Z - The History of Surveillance & Information in the United States
Winter Session, 2024
Prof. Jeff Lamson, jlamson@wesleyan.edu

Course Info:
Location: We will meet in Olin 204, except on January 18 (*TBD*)
Dates: January 9, 10, 12, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, (*Final Exam due 11:59 PM, January 24th*)
Time: 10:30 am - 12:00 pm (lecture & discussion); 2:00 pm - 4:30 pm (research lab)

Course Description:
This course considers the history of surveillance and information in the United States during the 19th and 20th centuries. We will explore technologies and systems that evolved during this period to track, codify, and control people in the U.S. and abroad, as well the many efforts to resist these processes. Readings and lectures will pay particular attention to how surveillance and control over information empowered both the state and private entities in novel ways, and reshaped how society understands itself.

The course is built around supporting students as they undertake a research project that interrogates how information and surveillance have shaped American history. Students will write an initial proposal for their research project prior to the start of class, and they will develop this project throughout the course. Each day we meet, the morning session will be dedicated to new content & material via lecture and class discussion. The afternoon session is our "research lab" which will include some roundtable sharing of our works in progress and instruction on methods, but will be primarily dedicated to working on the research projects themselves. While there are two full length books to read prior to the start of class, daily readings are relatively light to allow for students to focus on research.

Research Project
The central feature of this course is the completion of an original research project that addresses how surveillance and information have shaped American life & society. This will take the form of a 10-15-page research paper* (double-spaced, 12-point font) constituting 25% of your total grade. Please note, however, that the project deadlines & process also accounts for 25% in an effort to emphasize the research process as much as the final product itself.

*Students may propose an alternative final product (i.e., something other than a research paper) but this must be approved **by Monday, January 15.**

Grading Breakdown
Attendance & Participation: 15%
Book Reviews: 10% each (20% total)
Daily Responses: 15%
Project deadlines & process: 25%
Final Project: 25%

Course Schedule & Overview
(subject to minor changes)

Prior to Start of Class
Read:
(1) Josh Lauer and Kenneth Lipartito, *Surveillance Capitalism in America.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021.
(2) Christian Parenti, *The Soft Cage: Surveillance in America, From Slave Passes to the War on Terror*. New York: Basic Books, 2003.

Write:
(1) Write two 750 word book reviews per the assignment sheet on Moodle.
(2) Write your initial research proposal per assignment sheet on Moodle.

Tuesday, January 9: Does information have a history?
Readings Due:
    (1) Pre-Course Readings
Assignments Due:
    (1) Book Reviews
    (2) Initial Research Proposal
Guiding Questions: What is the history of information? How does information construct our lived experience? What its the relationship between information and different forms of power?

Research Agenda for January 9:
    (1) Roundtable discussion of research proposals, followed by group discussions
    (2) Setting a research agenda
    (3) Research strategies & using the library

Wednesday, January 10: Theories of Information, Technology, & Power
Readings Due:
    (1) Winner, Langdon. "Do Artifacts Have Politics?" *Daedalus*, vol. 109, no. 1 (Winter, 1980)
    (2) James M. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), pp. 22-33. (*see PDF on Moodle*)
Assignments Due:
    (1) Reading response
    (2) Revised research agenda
Guiding Questions: What theories guide the study of information? What is the relationship between the history of information and the history of technology? How are distinct epistemologies produced, and what are the historical drivers that have produced them?

Research Agenda for January 10:
      (1) Review updated research agendas
      (2) Discuss theory and methodology (frameworks) for research projects

Friday, January 12: Science of Surveillance
<u>Readings Due:</u>
      (1) Finn, Jonathan. "Picturing the Criminal" in *Capturing the Criminal Image: From Mug Shot to Surveillance Society* (2009).
<u>Assignments Due:</u>
      (1) Reading response
      (2) Draft theory & methods section of research paper
<u>Guiding Questions:</u> How did scientific/technical knowledge in the late 19th and early 20th centuries remake surveillance and the science of information? What is the role of the human body in constructing information and surveillance?

Research Agenda for January 12:
      (1) Roundtable on theory & methods - what sources did you find that you'll draw on?
      (2) Building your literature & source base
      (3) Research time & individual meetings - plan for the weekend.

Monday, January 15: Data & Knowledge Production
<u>Readings Due:</u>
      (1) Bouk, Dan. "The History and Political Economy of Personal Data over the Last Two Centuries in Three Acts." *Osiris*, vol. 32, 1. 2017, pp. 85-106.
      (2) Geoffrey Bowker and Susan Star, "The Case of Race Classification and Reclassification under Apartheid," in *Sorting Things Out: Classification and its Consequences*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000.
<u>Assignments Due:</u>
      (1) Reading response
      (2) Updated bibliography
<u>Guiding Questions:</u> How has the role of data changed over time? Can data produce its own realities? How or why do people accept these realities?

Research Agenda for January 15:
      (1) Agenda setting check in - are you on schedule? Do you need to adjust?
      (2) Primary sources vs. Secondary literature
      (3) How to write a literature review: What is your intervention?

Tuesday, January 16: Economies of Surveillance
<u>Readings Due:</u>
      (1) Josh Lauer, "Introduction" in *Creditworthy: A History of Consumer Surveillance and Financial Identity in America*. New York: Columbia University

Press, 2017.

Assignments Due:

    (1) Reading response

    (2) Draft literature review

Guiding Questions: How has surveillance shaped consumption and production in the United States? Can modern capitalism (or other economic systems) function without surveillance? How has surveillance shaped labor and labor power?

Research Agenda for January 16:

    (1) Discuss literature reviews

    (2) Historical narrative & storytelling - how to use it, why it is helpful

Wednesday, January 17: Privacy & Transparency in American Society

Readings Due:

    (1) Igo, Sara, "Introduction" and "The Porous Psyche" in *The Known Citizen: A History of Privacy in Modern America*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018.

Assignments Due:

    (1) Reading Response

    (2) Narrative writing

Guiding Questions: How have Americans resisted or accepted incursions into their privacy over time? Is privacy a human right? What are the advantages and risks of being "known" or "unknown"?

Research Agenda for January 17:

    (1) Narrative writing workshop & review

    (2) Why structure matters: building an outline

    (3) Research time & individual meetings

Thursday, January 18: Watching and Listening

Readings Due:

    (1) Brian Hochman, "Introduction" and "The Wiretapper's Nest" in *The Listeners: A History of Wiretapping in the United States*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2022.

Assignments Due:

    (1) Reading response

    (2) Outline

Guiding Questions: How has direct surveillance evolved over time? What are the legal structures that dictate surveillance capabilities, and do they have an effect? How have private vs. public forms of surveillance functioned?

Research Agenda for January 18:

    (1) Outline reviews

    (2) Preliminary arguments & elevator pitches

Friday, January 19: The Predictive Side of Surveilling

Readings Due:

(1) Bernard Harcourt, "Actuarial Methods in the Criminal Law" in *Against Prediction: Profiling, Policing, and Punishing in an Actuarial Age*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2007.

(2) Aaron Sankin and Surya Mattu, "Predictive Policing Software Terrible at Predicting Crimes," *The Markup,* Oct 2, 2023

Assignments Due:

(1) Reading response

(2) In the afternoon, presentations

Guiding Questions: How does information and surveillance serve prediction, and does the goal of predicting shape the process of surveillance in meaningful ways? What are the costs of predictive models?

Research Agenda for January 19:

(1) Presentations

(2) Group feedback, final questions, good luck! *

(3) *Final due by 11:59 PM on January 24.* **No exceptions.**

Other Course Information, University Policies, etc...

Academic Integrity

Honor Code: All students of Wesleyan University are responsible for knowing and adhering to the Honor Code of this institution. Violations of this policy may include: cheating, plagiarism, aid of academic dishonesty, fabrication, lying, bribery, and threatening behavior. All incidents of academic misconduct shall be reported to the Honor Code Council – Office of Student Affairs. Students who are found to be in violation of the academic integrity policy will be subject to both academic sanctions from the faculty members and non-academic sanctions (including but not limited to university probation, suspension, or expulsion). The Office of Student Affairs has more information.

Generative AI Policy: We will use A.I. software for several assignments in this course. This technology is changing rapidly and will inevitably become an important part of your academic and professional lives. In my use of A.I. so far, it has clear and substantive problems including incorrect information, painfully boring prose, and reductionist explanations. It is, however, helpful for certain tasks like summarizing, selectively editing your own work, and brainstorming. So, we will use the software. You must, however, acknowledge having done so on any assignments that you turn in. Furthermore, having it answer prompts in their entirety or in substantial portions will be considered a violation of academic integrity.

Other Course & University Policies

Students with Disabilities
> Wesleyan University is committed to ensuring that all qualified students with disabilities are afforded an equal opportunity to participate in, and benefit from, its programs and services. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact Accessibility Services as soon as possible.

If you have a disability, or think that you might have a disability, please contact Accessibility Services in order to arrange an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations. Accessibility Services is located in North College, rooms 024/218, or can be reached by email accessibility@wesleyan.edu.

Religious/Spiritual Observance Resources
> If you anticipate that your religious/spiritual observance may conflict with academic obligations such as attending class, taking examinations, or submitting assignments, you can work directly with your professor to make reasonable arrangements. Should you require additional support or guidance, please feel free to reach out to Rabbi David Teva, Director of the Office of Religious and Spiritual Life at dleipziger@wesleyan.edu or any of the chaplains in the Office of Religious and Spiritual Life at https://www.wesleyan.edu/orsl/index.html.

For a list of religious holidays celebrated by members of the Wesleyan community, go to Wesleyan's Multifaith calendar which can be found at: https://www.wesleyan.edu/orsl/multifaith-calendar.html.

Title IX Resources
> If past trauma inhibits your ability to fully participate in class, please contact Debbie Colucci, Deputy Title IX Coordinator, at dcolucci@wesleyan.edu, or your class dean. Additionally, and if you are comfortable, you can work directly with your professor to make reasonable arrangements. If you would like to talk with a confidential resource about all of your options for care and support under Title IX, you can contact Johanna DeBari (SHAPE Office Director) at jdebari@wesleyan.edu.

Classroom Behavior
> Students and faculty each have responsibility for maintaining an appropriate learning environment. Those who fail to adhere to such behavioral standards may be subject to discipline. Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, color, culture, religion, creed, politics, veteran's status, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, gender expression, age, ability, and nationality. Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student's legal name. I will gladly honor your request to address you by an alternate name or gender pronoun. Please advise me of this preference early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records. For more information, see the policies on the student code.

Discrimination and Harassment

      Wesleyan University is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working, and living environment and does not tolerate identity-based discriminatory harassment and/or sexual misconduct against students, faculty, staff, trustees, volunteers, and employees of any university contractors/agents. For purposes of this Wesleyan policy, identity refers to one's race, color, religion, national or ethnic origin, age, disability, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, and gender expression. The Office for Equity and Inclusion serves students, faculty, administrators and develops policies and procedures regarding issues of diversity and equal opportunity/affirmative action. Individuals who believe they have been discriminated against should contact the Office for Equity and Inclusion at 860-685-4771.

Syllabus subject to change.