Is there something uniquely “American” about the development of science in the US? This course explores the history of science and scientific communities in America in the late-19th and 20th centuries, examining how the American political and cultural context has shaped—and been shaped by—scientific ideas and practices. Using case studies including genetics, nuclear physics, medicine, and global warming, we will examine the development of modern theories and techniques, the professionalization of science, how race and gender have influenced science, and the contested evolution of science policy in the United States. Course readings will exemplify a wide range of approaches to investigating and writing about history that students can use as models for their own work. Each student will conduct an original research project on a topic of their choice, and we will devote some class time to discussing how to choose research questions, how to identify and analyze historical sources, and how to make a convincing historical argument. No prior STS courses required.

Required books (in the order they will be read):


A variety of shorter readings will be provided via the Scholar course website.