Born in 1809, Abraham Lincoln came of age at a time of profound technological change. An accomplished lawyer and occasional politician, he grappled throughout his life with the promise and threats posed by revolutionary new technologies: telegraphs, steam transport, factories, and the rise of a highly productive agricultural sector that flooded global markets with American wheat and cotton. As technology rapidly expanded the nation’s reach yet compressed time and space as never before, it transformed both the substance and the practice of politics and law, in ways that eventually grew entangled with the question of slavery and the future of democracy. Professor Usselman will examine this volatile era of American politics and draw parallels to our own times, when rapid technological change and globalization again figure so prominently in the nation’s affairs, even as great moral issues of social justice hang in the balance.

A historian of technology, innovation, and public policy, Steve Usselman studies American economic development and the dynamics of global capitalism since 1815. He teaches courses on Technology in America; Law, Technology, and Politics; Business Organizations and Political Economy; and Engineering in History.

Usselman's publications include Regulating Railroad Innovation: Business, Technology, and Politics in America, 1840-1920; The Challenge of Remaining Innovative: Lessons from Twentieth Century American Business (with Sally Clarke and Naomi Lamoreaux), and The Rise of Big Business, 1860-1920 (forthcoming with Glenn Porter). His numerous articles and book chapters include the award-winning "IBM and Its Imitators," one of several devoted to the history of information technology.

A past president of the Society for the History of Technology, Usselman recently served as senior editor of The Oxford Encyclopedia of the History of Science, Medicine, and Technology. He is currently at work on two projects: one examines new business practices associated with changes in global transport and logistics since 1945; the other traces the role of the vertical centrifugal pump and its spin-offs on California industrial development.