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CENTER FOR GENETICS AND SOCIETY

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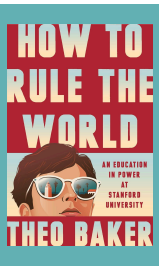
SPOTLIGHT



Book Review: How to Rule the World

Pete Shanks, *Biopolitical Times* | 07.10.2026

The Stanford student journalist who uncovered a research misconduct scandal that led to the university president's resignation is back to share the whole tale of big tech money, neo-eugenics, and AI hype in Silicon Valley.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Pop Panic: Critical Reflections on Population Panics

A new substack launched by friends of CGS Rajani Bhatia, Joe Padgett Herz, Charlie Ambrose, Anne Hendrixson, and Annie Wilkinson will offer “nuanced, feminist interventions into population panics." **Learn more** about the project and check out the **guidelines for submissions**.

Welcome, Cindi!

Cindi Ooi joins CGS as an intern through the Collective Rising program. Cindi is a third year student at Mount Holyoke College pursuing a degree in Critical Race & Political Economy and Politics, along with a certificate for Asian Pacific American Studies at the Western Massachusetts 5 College Consortium. Through CGS, they hope to explore the political and racial implications of newly developing technologies around genetic modification and work against narratives that encourage eugenics in policy.

CGS IN THE NEWS

Palantir has a hand in NIH's most ambitious health initiative

Julia Métraux, *Mother Jones* | 07.07.2026

Commenting on Palantir's involvement in the NIH's "All of Us" initiative, CGS' Katie Hasson said, “[It] is concerning to have one company that has such a large role in [handling] so many different kinds of data... I don’t think people hoping to benefit public health by sharing their genetic data were really thinking that that’s the kind of company that would be handling their information.”

COMMENTARY

Taking a closer look at recent reporting on gene-edited embryos

Katie Hasson, *Biopolitical Times* | 07.10.2026

Media coverage of embryo gene editing implies that genetically modified babies are close to becoming a reality. As billionaires invest in and attempt to profit off of “designer baby” technologies, efforts to normalize heritable genome editing are especially dangerous.

WHAT WE’RE READING

GENE EDITING | GENE THERAPY | GENOMICS
GENETIC TESTING | EUGENICS AND ABLEISM | SYNTHETIC BIOLOGY
ASSISTED REPRODUCTION | SURROGACY360
U.S. FEDERAL POLICY | VARIOUS

GENE EDITING

Key findings of the 'Fertility, Embryo Research and Genome Editing' report

Sarah Norcross, Sandy Starr, Amanda Cooney, and Anneliese Burton, *BioNews* | 07.06.2026

A new report from the UK's Progress Educational Trust explores public attitudes about fertility treatment, embryo research, genome editing, donor conception, and surrogacy in the UK, the Netherlands, Spain and Italy. The authors highlight findings that suggest public support for heritable genome editing.

The Guardian view on gene-edited humans: darker uses must be acknowledged alongside medical ones

The Guardian | 07.05.2026

Safety concerns form the basis of most laws banning heritable genome editing, but ethical concerns also provide robust reasons to ban the technique. Given the short distance between medical uses and “on-demand genetic designs,” regulation cannot be relied on to prevent the more sinister uses of heritable genome editing techniques. Public conversation is needed to ensure that ethical issues with heritable genome editing, in addition to safety issues, form part of the public evaluation of these techniques.

We’ve uncovered a master gene that switches on human development

Michael Le Page, *New Scientist* | 06.25.2026

Using base editing, researchers identified a gene that is responsible for initiating the process of embryo development. The research focuses on the use of base editing to understand early

embryonic cell development and potentially improve IVF, but the researchers involved also see potential for using gene editing in reproduction, despite bans and safety risks.

Advocacy Groups Express Mixed Views on Embryo Editing

Ashley Smart, *Undark* | 06.24.2026

Advocacy groups for people living with genetic disorders are not currently pursuing commercial embryo editing ventures. Many expressed ethical concerns about heritable genome editing and focus instead on existing possibilities, including somatic gene therapies and preimplantation genetic testing, and continuing challenges, including access to treatments.

New human embryo editing advances require tough conversations on ethical boundaries

Paul Knoepfler, *Stat* | 06.24.2026

Links between experimental base editing of human embryos and commercial attempts to “optimize” human embryos make it clear that embryo editing research, even when not expressly oriented towards eugenics, will be used to advance eugenic goals. A 10-year moratorium on heritable genome editing is needed to address current risks and respond to Silicon Valley enthusiasm for the technique.

Medical Cure or Designer Baby? A New Approach to Editing Embryos Ignites Debate

Emily Baumgaertner Nunn, *The New York Times* | 06.11.2026

Researchers advancing base editing of embryos claim they are just providing data for public discussion about the ethics of gene editing, but critics suggest that their research itself is morally irresponsible. Despite potentially dire consequences, there is likely to be a “substantial commercial push” to encourage the use of base editing of embryos “to optimize the human genome” for wealthy parents.

Base editing in human embryos fixes some mutations and creates others

Max Barnhart, *Chemical & Engineering News* | 06.09.2026

Unresolved safety issues, bans in over 70 countries, and the recent call by gene therapy societies for a moratorium should be evidence enough for proponents that “science is not ready for heritable human genome editing.”

GENE THERAPY

FDA opens path to approval for Hunter syndrome gene therapy

Rebecca Simkin, *BioNews* | 06.29.2026

Reversing its decision from earlier this year, the FDA will allow Regenxbio to reapply for licensing of its gene therapy for Hunter syndrome, based on existing clinical data.

Unregulated gene therapy for longevity to launch

Marisa Flook, *BioNews* | 06.29.2026

An anti-aging gene therapy that hasn’t been approved by the FDA or other major regulators will soon be offered by clinics outside of US jurisdiction in Honduras, the Bahamas, and Panama. Experts warn that the untested treatment could have dangerous effects.

GENOMICS

The Genes That Could Cancel Out a Fatal Diagnosis

Roxanne Khamsi, *The Atlantic* | 07.07.2026

Genomics research now shows that varied factors influence the felt effects of genetic mutations, and that these effects are often milder than we might think. Researchers are scanning genomes for

rare diseases, identifying “modifier genes” that suppress harmful effects of genetic mutations, and developing drugs that replicate these genes to treat people experiencing severe genetic conditions.

N.I.H. Announces World’s Largest Integrated Health Database

Emily Baumgaertner Nunn, *The New York Times* | 06.30.2026

The NIH’s *All of Us* program, initiated in 2018, has released the world’s largest database of human genomes and clinical data to investigate causes and treatments of disease. Most participants in the database are from groups overlooked in medical research.

New NIH security rules for genomic data sets are slowing research, prompting workarounds

Georgia Michelman, *Science* | 06.18.2026

Researchers are criticizing the NIH’s rollout of new IT rules for accessing genomics data, due to the cost of the required tech infrastructure and the lack of support as they struggle to comply.

Why the Human Genome’s Tangled Physicality May Confound AI

Philip Ball, *Quanta* | 06.18.2026

The genome is not a linear, unchanging instruction manual. It’s dynamic – responding not only to environment and context, but also a variety of regulation mechanisms in the genome itself.

These ‘master’ proteins protect us from deadly mutations — and could inspire new drugs

Philip Ball, *Nature* | 06.17.2026

“Buffer genes” play an important intermediary role between genetics and environment. They can mask the effects of genetic mutations, but when they are less active or absent, especially in instances of environmental stress, genetic mutations may be expressed. The role of buffer genes complicates attempts to predict risk of disease based on genetic analysis and highlights the importance of environment in disease development.

GENETIC TESTING

With Genetic Testing, How Much Information Is Too Much?

Daniela J. Lamas, *The New York Times* | 06.22.2026

Moves toward widespread sequencing of newborns’ genomes are advancing without necessary supports, such as counseling, education, and clinical infrastructure to navigate complex ethical questions and unknowns.

I read the fine print on at-home DNA and health tests - watch out for these risks

Elyse Betters Picaro, *ZDNet* | 06.13.2026

Marketing claims suggest that direct-to-consumer DNA testing empowers individuals with health knowledge, but the fine print of customer agreements shows that DTC health data is not always governed by HIPAA, is difficult to interpret without a genetic counselor, and could be used by law enforcement or for marketing.

The Researcher Who Didn’t Want to Know

Gina Kolata, *The New York Times* | 06.11.2026

Nancy Wexler, whose research on Huntington’s disease led to the identification of the gene that causes it and development of a blood test that allows people to find out if they inherited it, chose not to be tested herself. Now 80 and contending with the progression of Huntington’s, she reflects on her reasons to forego testing, the persistence of uncertainty even with genetic testing, and her experience of the disease.

ABLEISM AND EUGENICS

Autistic people aren't afraid of genetic research – they are afraid of what scientists might do with it

Samuelle Fajutrao Falk, *The Conversation* | 06.26.2026

Recent research shows that most autistic people and their parents are not opposed to genetic research, but they are concerned that such research might be used for eugenic purposes – to eliminate autism via genetic selection and to spread the idea that autistic people should not exist.

Good Lives

Jan Grue, *Boston Review* | 06.17.2026

Three new books take up philosophical questions about disability that reemerge in light of new versions of old eugenic ableism: "Why can we only conceive of certain lives as problems to be remedied? Why, in short, does disability remain synonymous with deficit?"

RFK Jr. Will Oversee Disability Education Policy

Julia Métraux, *Mother Jones* | 06.16.2026

As part of a continuing effort to dismantle the Department of Education, The Trump administration is moving oversight of disability education to the Department of Health and Human Services. Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s track record of spreading misinformation about autism raises concerns about his potential impact on education for students with disabilities.

Autistic children being injected with unapproved stem cell treatments supported by RFK Jr.

Ed Pilkington, *The Guardian* | 06.12.2026

Clinics in Florida, Texas, and other states are selling parents of autistic children unproven, potentially harmful stem cell injections for children as young as 18 months old, with the encouragement of RFK Jr.

SYNTHETIC BIOLOGY

This Cell Feeds, Grows and Reproduces. And It's Manmade.

Carl Zimmer and Marco Hernandez, *The New York Times* | 07.01.2026

Researchers created synthetic cells that feed, grow, reproduce, and compete with one another for food. It's the first time synthetic cells have been able to perform several functions. The researchers have founded a nonprofit to continue developing the synthetic cells and establish safeguards to prevent misuse.

The next AI safety fight may actually be about DNA

Shayna Korol, *Vox* | 06.12.2026

Sam Altman and his AI CEO competitors have agreed that more robust regulations are needed around gene synthesis, given the risks of AI systems being used to develop bioweapons. In an open letter they call on Congress to develop new gene synthesis screening rules.

SURROGACY360

Central Asian Women Recruited Into Georgia's Surrogacy Market via Social Media

K. Krombie, *The Times of Central Asia* | 06.24.2026

Russian-language social media ads recruit surrogates from Central Asia by promoting surrogacy as paid work. Some online recruiters and clinic coordinators were previously surrogates themselves, which can make the process feel less commercial. However, the bulk of the compensation for surrogacy is not provided until after delivery, which can leave surrogates with limited financial power even in the face of poor living conditions.

ASSISTED REPRODUCTION

Is Kidmaxxing the Ultimate Status Symbol for Ultimate Wealth?
Anna Louie Sussman, *The New York Times* | 07.01.2026
Regulation is needed to prevent wealthy men from using fertility technologies to have large numbers of “bespoke” children. Reining in those who think they can make the world in their “genetic image” will also require addressing underlying wealth inequality.

Services Sold to Boost I.V.F. Odds Backed by Little Evidence, Study Finds
Maggie Astor, *The New York Times* | 06.23.2026
A new study reveals that there is no evidence that expensive IVF “add-ons,” which are sold to patients to boost chances of IVF success, actually work.

'If we were a straight couple...': Understanding LGBTQ+ family-building experiences in the UK
Jennifer Takhar, Carolyn Wilson-Nash, and Chloe He, *BioNews* | 06.22.2026
A study on LGBTQ+ experiences of fertility treatment in the UK underscored the additional barriers that LGBTQ+ prospective parents experience in the industry. Policy reform is needed to address gaps between legal access and equitable access.

The Womb Boom
Mark Ellwood, *Air Mail* | 06.06.2026
High demand, big profit margins, and constrained supply in the US surrogacy industry have attracted the interest of private equity companies, which have been acquiring IVF clinics with surrogacy ventures. The change will likely increase healthcare costs and will prioritize growth and scale at the expense of policies and practices that protect surrogates, intended parents, and children born via surrogacy.

U.S. FEDERAL POLICY

Trump Administration Moves to Preserve Cells and DNA of Imperiled Species
Carl Zimmer and Catrin Einhorn, *The New York Times* | 06.25.2026
The Trump administration announced that it will partner with Colossal Biosciences, the company that has been attempting to “de-extinct” animals, to preserve DNA and tissues from threatened and endangered species.

HHS Pushes Fetal Personhood in New Grant Guidelines
Anna Rogers, *Mother Jones* | 06.19.2026
HHS’ funding of embryo donation employs the language of fetal personhood, which is popular among anti-abortion conservatives. While federal funding for embryo donation isn’t new, the change in language is part of a broader push by abortion opponents to normalize fetal personhood language.

Updated: Tracking RFK Jr.’s promises to remake health in America
Isabella Cueto and J. Emory Parker, *Stat* | 06.11.2026
Stat’s tracker of Robert F. Kennedy Jr.’s policy promises shows that most have been abandoned, broken, or not started. Many of the promises he has followed through on have been met with criticism from scientific and policy experts.

Tiny HHS office tasked with protecting research participants’ safety is running on fumes
Megan Molteni, *Stat* | 06.05.2026

Facing a slashed budget and the loss of ethics experts, can this small federal office effectively ensure the safety of study participants in research funded by the Department of Health and Human Services?

VARIOUS

‘There’s this deep mystery of what, actually, is this thing?’: the philosopher inside Google DeepMind AI

Robert P. Baird, *The Guardian* | 06.30.2026

Disagreements about the risks and benefits of anthropomorphizing large language models and of the prospect of artificial general intelligence persist in companies working on these technologies. Some aim to speed up their efforts in the face of ethical concerns, while others are trying to slow down to grapple with ethical questions the technologies present.

UK’s stem cell transplant system may be putting lives at risk, report by MPs finds

Tobi Thomas, *The Guardian* | 06.10.2026

A parliamentary report found that the UK´s stem cell transplant system has inadequate infrastructure, does not meet the needs of minority groups, and lacks sustainability for the long term. These problems put patients’ lives at risk.

If you’ve read this far, you clearly care about the fight to reclaim human biotechnologies for the common good. Thank you!

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