Prof. Siva Vaidhyanathan will discuss the errors in policy and public relations that doomed Facebook’s “Free Basics” effort in India, a plan to offer a special mobile data plan to Indians who could not afford standard plans. But the services would be limited to those that Facebook approved. Facebook’s attempt to seem altruistic and the arrogant statements of its leaders and supporters doomed the efforts with Indian regulators. The conflict reveals important lessons about the legacies of colonialism, the 20th-century development ideology, and the culture of Silicon Valley. It also un masks some basic problems with efforts to make companies socially responsible.


After five years as a professional journalist, Siva Vaidhyanathan earned a Ph.D. in American Studies from the University of Texas at Austin. He has taught at Wesleyan University, the University of Wisconsin at Madison, Columbia University, New York University, and the University of Amsterdam. He is a fellow at the New York Institute for the Humanities and a Faculty Associate of the Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University.

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