

HAS 222d Spring 2009

Essay 3

Out: Tues 19 May

Back: 1st draft: Tues 26 May

final: Tues 2 June

Energy and the Commons

We are faced with demand for energy that is increasing (and we face 'peaks' of supply and deep environmental impacts). There are several forms of the growing demand: population, affluence & life-style, and technology. Write a 2500 - word essay on the conflicting views of energy as a common resource, and energy as a commodity to be bought, owned, sold. Oil lying beneath public lands or solar energy harvested in the desert might be thought to be public resources but both are developed commercially and sold to us.. Electricity has long been a mixture of public and private utilities. We have seen (Enron...) how 'commodification' of electricity distribution can lead to trouble. Earlier native societies have developed governance of common resources: how are we doing in comparison?

- Given the title of this course be sure to remember to contrast the needs of 'environment' as well as the human demand for energy.

- Include some science in your essay; this can sharpen the debate, for example to know somewhat quantitatively how use of one energy resource impacts the environment.

- There is a 'twist' in this essay. Give part of your attention to the contrasting idea of commonality...shared resources....seen in Arctic native communities. As well as having deep traditional historic roots, the climate and energy resources of the cold North present have shaped their 'solutions'. This is a poignant question, as Alaskan natives are sitting on a large oil resource, sought after by the rest of the world.

As usual, within the small space of your essay focus on a few vivid examples rather than spending too much space in general 'overviewing'.