

In The U.S. we live in a country in crisis where geo-political and economic history is being made with profound implications for the future of Americans and for many people in other countries. Resource issues involving energy, earth materials, and water are central to the present challenges facing the U.S. and are both technical and cultural in scope. Hence, America faces a crossroads in resource policy and cultural values. Both great challenges and opportunities exist today and the issues are complexly interwoven with present values, history and current events around the world. Contradictions between the chronic materialistic American lifestyle, the limitations of the earth to provide for the growing needs of over six billion people globally, the present foreign policies in the Middle East, and the lack of an enlightened energy policy as the world faces the downside of Hubbert's Peak, have polarized political discourse to a point of stalemate over conflicting ideologies. Interdependence of both humans on earth resources and global economies and the impact of industrial societies on the environment are finally coming into focus. While climate change is part of nature, global warming induced by humans now confronts our future and is manifest in many ways with serious consequences yet it has become in some circles, a disparaged topic mired in political propaganda. What are the known causes of natural changes in global temperatures? How does the temperature and greenhouse gas record over human existence depart from the natural trends on a geological time scale? How did divergent perspectives over global warming emerge? Is the traditional role of science advising to government as active and effective today as it has been in the past? Access to oil has motivated the Iraq War yet domestic production of energy from coal and nuclear power remain as alternatives but both are met with opposition. What are the demonstrable environmental consequences of increased nuclear and coal development? Without interim energy solutions can alternative energy sources alone sustain the US? How are federal policies and cultural attitudes today rooted in the past? What lessons can we learn from an iconic history of the West about technological and social progress during times of inequitable treatment of people of different cultures by a superpower in need of new land and earth resources to implement federal policy? We will explore the peoples of the West through lectures, discussions, and documentary and popular films. An uncommon history is given of cultural interaction with the land; cultural conflicts over space, the geological foundation of earth resources of fuels, metals, and industrial minerals. We will explore some overlooked historical facts that, while only rarely taught as part of the American education, help expose the underlying motivation for decisive governmental actions today and explain the broad powers exerted by largely unregulated corporations today. Federal statutes are described including the Homestead Act, Mining Act, Chinese Exclusion Act, and Japanese Internment Camps. This complex legacy of the American West; its magnificent achievements of unprecedented conservation of open space and supply of resources to support industrialization have been fundamental to the American ideal. The present awareness of the imperative of reaching a sustainable stewardship role shapes the divergent ideologies today and affects your future tomorrow. Research projects by students explore these issues from a combined perspective of scientific, historical, and cultural aspects. A class symposium offers a forum for students to share and debate their research findings.