This seminar explores the role of energy as a driving force in history. Taking the widespread harnessing of fossil fuels in the nineteenth century as our pivot, we consider both the prior energy regimes of wood, wind, water, and human and animal muscle, as well as the politics of energy production and consumption from the industrial age to the present. While attentive to issues of environmental impact, we also examine the broader implications of energy use for social, economic, and political structures across time. Readings consist of primary sources, classic works, recent scholarship, and a graphic novel, with cases drawn from all around the globe. As part of this course, we will also be taking a field trip to the Cornell Central Energy Plant.

Questions? Contact Professor Victor Seow (vseow@cornell.edu)