Path Dependence Theory and Analysis

ESS 591 (LN #84596) / ASB 591 (LN #86352)
3 credits – Fall 2009
Wednesdays 11:50am – 2:20pm
location: TBA

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Path Dependency is a phenomenon that has been studied by numerous fields and given multiple names including permanences, technological momentum, and lock-in. The basic idea is that certain decisions about institutions, technologies, and the built environment can put in place frameworks that seem to take on a life of their own. As more social, political, and economic capital is tied up with these frameworks they exert a force back on society and are increasingly difficult to change.

This class will explore the approaches to this idea taken by a number of different disciplines in order to tease out their commonalities and individual contributions to the idea. In addition to understanding the basics of the idea we will look at a few case studies and begin to formulate ideas about avenues for change in the face of path dependency.

This class is affiliated with the SHESC Late Lessons from Early History research project: "Change is Hard: The Challenges of Path Dependency." Students are encouraged to pursue their own interests through the class but there may be additional research opportunities as well.