The United States in the Twentieth Century

“Americans suffer from an ignorance that is not only colossal, but sacred.”
—James Baldwin

The United States in the Twentieth Century is a thematic lecture course on the United States since 1900. The main focus of the lectures will be politics, broadly-defined. The readings consist of novels and non-fiction writing, with a scattering of primary sources.

Assignments: Students will write three short papers, each worth 25% of the final grade. Students will also attend and participate in Friday section meetings, which will be worth the remaining 25%.

The following books are required and available for purchase at the Seminary Coop:

Jane Dailey, Building the American Republic: A Narrative History From 1877 available at www.buildingtheamericanrepublic.org

Sinclair Lewis, Babbitt
Kurt Vonnegut, Slaughterhouse-Five
Phillip Roth, Indignation
Rachel Carson, Silent Spring
James Baldwin, The Fire Next Time
David Remnick, King of the World
Hunter Thompson, Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas
Gail Collins, When Everything Changed: The Amazing Journey of American Women from 1960 to the Present
Atif Aman and Amir Sufi, House of Debt: How They (and You) Caused the Great Recession, and How We Can Prevent It from Happening Again

Class Schedule

Week 1: Interconnected (1900–1914)

Jan. 4  Introduction
Jan. 6  BTAR chs. 1 & 2
Jan. 8  Section discussion
Week 2: Vertigo (1914–1928)

Jan. 11  Lewis, *Babbitt*
Jan. 13  *BTAR* chs. 3 & 4
Jan. 15  Discussion section

Week 3: Depression (1928–1938)

Jan. 18:  **MLK Day: No class**  *BTAR* Ch. 5
Jan. 20:  Franklin Roosevelt, “Commonwealth Club Address”

Week 4: Assertion (1938–1946)

Jan. 25:  Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse 5*; **Paper #1 due**
Jan. 27:  *BTAR* ch. 6
Jan. 29:  Discussion section

Week 5: Containment (1946–1953)

Feb. 1:  *BTAR* ch. 7
Feb. 3:  *Indignation*
Feb. 5:  Discussion section

Week 6: At Odds (1954–1965)

Feb. 8:  *BTAR* ch. 8
Feb. 10:  *Silent Spring*
Feb. 12:  **College Break: no class; Paper #2 due**

Week 7: Riven (1965–1968)

Feb. 15:  *BTAR* ch. 9
Feb. 17: *King of the World*

Feb. 19: Discussion section

**Week 8:** Breakdown (1968–1974)

Feb. 22: *BTAR* ch. 10

Feb. 24: Thompson, *Fear & Loathing in Las Vegas*

Feb. 26: Discussion section

**Week 9:** Right (1974–1989)

Feb. 29: *BTAR* ch. 11

Mar. 2: *When Everything Changed*

Mar. 4: Discussion section

**Week 10:** Vulnerable (1989–2010)

Mar. 7: *BTAR* chs. 12 & 13; *House of Debt*

Mar. 9: Discussion section

*Paper #3 due March 11*