In 1959, in the aftermath of Nazism, Hannah Arendt described some features of authoritarianism, including a hierarchical relationship between ruler and ruled, suppression of civil liberties, and arbitrary acts against groups and individuals. The concept of authoritarianism has been mainly used to refer to a type of political authority. But authoritarianism involves beliefs, rhetoric, performances, and subjectivities—meaning construction—and therefore deserves cultural analysis as well. In this course, we bring to bear some of the tools of cultural sociology, with sideways glances to political theory, cultural history, and media and feminist studies, to illuminate the vexing moment we find ourselves in. While our focus will be the contemporary US, we will draw links to 20th and 21st century Europe, and, at times, to other times and places.

We will explore different approaches to understanding power and subjectivity, and consider the cultural contexts of contemporary authoritarianisms: growing inequalities, the growth of rightwing organizations, and a shifting media environment. We will focus our attention upon three recent empirical studies of the rightwing (by Hochschild, Bail, and Nagle), evaluating their arguments, evidence, and methodologies. Students are also encouraged to attend monthly programs at the Institute for Research on Women, whose theme this year (“The Perils of Populism”) dovetails closely with the content of this course. (More information to follow.)

Students will write a final paper on a topic approved by the professor. They will workshop the paper during the course, and present it in class at the end of the course.

All articles are posted on Sakai unless otherwise specified.

**Required books:**


Hugh Gusterson and Catherine Besteman, eds. *The Insecure American: How We Got Here and What we Should Do About It* (California, 2009)

Angela Nagle, *Kill All Normies: Online Culture Wars From 4Chan And Tumblr To Trump and the Alt-Right* (OR Books, 2017).


Sept 6. Introduction: Signs of a New Authoritarianism?

Tim Snyder, “Trump is Ushering in a Dark New Conservatism”
https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/jul/15/trumps-nostalgia-1930s-republicans

Tomasz Kitlinski, “Far-Right Über Alles”
http://www.publicseminar.org/2016/11/far-right-uber-alles/#.WYYEyWOgH-Z

Corey Robin, “Think Trump is an Authoritarian? Look at His Actions, Not his Words,” The Guardian
https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/may/02/donald-trump-authoritarian-look-actions-not-words

Jeffrey C. Isaac, “Trump is an Authoritarian,”
http://www.publicseminar.org/2017/05/trump-is-an-authoritarian-in-his-actions-and-his-words-and-words-are-actions/#.WWblhmOgGt9

Judith Butler, “Reflections on Trump,”
https://culanth.org/fieldsights/1032-reflections-on-trump

Sept. 13. Authority, Authoritarianisms, and Culture
What is authority? How has it been defined in relation to politics and psychology? How might we understand its cultural dimensions?

Edward Shils, “Center and Periphery” (1961)

Hannah Arendt, “What is Authority?”(1959)


http://www.nybooks.com/articles/1995/06/22/ur-fascism/

Sept. 20. Imagining the Nation
How do political symbols and speech imagine the nation, and construct national identities?


Jason L. Mast, “Action in culture: Act I of the presidential primary campaign in the U.S., April to December, 2015,” *American Journal of Cultural Sociology*


Trump’s Inaugural Address https://www.whitehouse.gov/inaugural-address

September 27. Studying Political Beliefs: Emotional Cultures of the Right
Using sociological tools to understand the “deep story” of rightwing Americans.

Arlie Hochschild, *Strangers in Their Own Land*

Oct. 4. Insecurity and Resentment
What factors give rise to insecurity in the contemporary US? How have these insecurities fueled resentment?

Hugh Gusterson and Catherine Besteman, eds. *The Insecure American.* Introduction, ch. 3, 4, 5, 13, 15

Branko Milanovic, “The erosion of the middle class share in market income” https://www.gc.cuny.edu/Page-Elements/Academics-Research-Centers-Initiatives/Centers-and-Institutes/Stone-Center-on-Socio-Economic-Inequality/Core-Faculty,-Team,-and-Affiliated-LIS-Scholars/Branko-Milanovic/Datasets

“Sharp Partisan Divisions in Views of National Institutions"  

Thomas Edsall, “How Fear of Falling Explains the Love of Trump”  

**A preliminary statement of your research project is due October 1. Email a short project description to me. Be as specific as possible and include citations to a few key reference works. If you are undecided about your focus, send ideas for two possible projects.**

**10/5. Nancy Fraser, “A Feminism for the 99%”**  
IRW Distinguished Lecture Series, RDJC Conference Room, 4:30pm

Oct. 11. Power, Ideology, and Subjectivities  
How do everyday inequalities of race, class, and gender shape political subjectivities? What is ideology, and how have social critics understood it?


Judith Butler, The Psychic Life of Power (1997), excerpt

Oct. 18. Emotional Cultures of the Right—continued  
Religious beliefs and feelings, and possible linkages to conservative ideologies.

Arlie Hochschild, Strangers in Their Own Land—cont’d.


Susan Harding, “Get Religion,” in The Insecure American

“White Evangelicals Voted Overwhelmingly for Donald Trump, Exit Polls Show”

Oct. 25. The Politics of Us and Them
How groups create solidarities by constructing internal and external enemies.


Nov. 1. Organizations and Public Opinion: Manufacturing Islamophobia
How did a handful of extremist pressure groups manage to mainstream Islamophobia?

Christopher Bail, *Terrified*

**11/2** “Organizing, Surviving, Resisting,” panel discussion with LA Kauffman, Kenyon Farrow, and Robyn Rodriguez. 4.30 pm, RDJC Conference Room

Nov.8. Discussion of Student Research in Progress. No reading.

Nov. 15. Media and Popular Culture
A quick survey of theories of media and popular culture as they bear on issues relating to contemporary political culture.

Jurgen Habermas, “The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article” (1964)


https://msuweb.montclair.edu/~furrg/hj/chomskyhermanpropmodel.pdf


Nov. 22. No class.

Nov. 29. New Media, the Networked Society, and the “Alt-right”
How did a racist, masculinist subculture find a home on the Internet (and in the White House)?

Angela Nagle, Kill All Normies


Dec. 6. Past, Present and Future
Can understanding the past help us defend democracy today?

Timothy Snyder, On Tyranny: Lessons from the 20th Century

**12/7 Sabine Hark, “Discursive Dispossessions: Gender as a Resource for the Construction of Authoritarian Us/Them Dichotomies,” Institute for Research on Women, RJDC conference room, 4:30

Dec. 13. Conclusion, Student presentations