

COMM 950: Special Topics in Communication Studies
Populism, Demagoguery, and Rhetoric of the Far Right

Description: This seminar examines the structural transformations in U.S. political discourse that have facilitated the rise of the far-right into the mainstream. Understood as rhetorical problems, the prominence of conspiracies theories, demagoguery, post-truth discourse, paranoia, and the politics of enmity can be understood according to what psychoanalytical theorist Slavoj Žižek characterizes as the “decline in symbolic efficiency” in the West, or the waning power of the signifier (language) to install social reality and enforce cultural prohibitions. To make sense of the more perverse psychical structures engendered by these heresies against the symbolic order, this seminar examines the rise of far-right rhetoric over the past decade with an eye toward their profound destabilizing effect on even the most basic forms of intersubjective communication. Working through the growing literature on conservative populism within and outside of the field of rhetorical studies, this course considers how the far-right’s conceptualization of sovereignty, personhood, race/whiteness, sexuality, and masculinity rhetorically craft an exclusive, violent, and transgressive vision of the polity.

Selected Readings: Theodor W. Adorno, *Aspects of the New Right-Wing Extremism* (New York: Wiley, 2020)
Heather Suzanne Woods and Leslie Hahner, *Make America Meme Again: The Rhetoric of the Alt-Right* (New York: Peter Lang, 2019).
Paul Elliott Johnson, *I, the People: The Rhetoric of Conservative Populism in the United States* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2021).
Joshua Gunn, *Political Perversion: Rhetorical Aberration in a Time of Trumpeteering* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020).
Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion: An American History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017).
Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (New York: Verso, 2007).
Michael J. Lee and R. Jarrod Atchison, *We are Not One People: Secession and Separatism in American Politics Since 1776* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022).
Patricia Roberts Miller, *Demagoguery and Democracy* (New York: The Experiment, 2017).
Cynthia Miller-Idriss, *Hate in the Homeland: The New Global Far Right* (Princeton University Press, 2022).

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Recent book [Apocalypse Man: The Death Drive and the Rhetoric of White Masculine Victimhood](#) (Ohio State Press, 2020)