

American Precarity

The election of Donald Trump cast a national spotlight on the political discontent of millions of Americans, a broad segment of whom are white, working class, and residing in regions of the country marked by unprecedented precarity, a condition of economic dislocation and social insecurity now affecting descendants of the post-WWII middle class. Drawing on an interdisciplinary array of ethnographic, journalistic, and analytical sources, this course traces the histories of the present that have produced cross-cutting zones of abandonment and social trauma not easily pigeon-holed by concepts of race, class, gender, and citizenship. Attentive to the concerns of this new voting block as well as to those of the movements for social justice it denigrates, we delve into the apparatuses of neoliberal capitalism itself, tracking its affective economies, global entanglements, and myriad modes of commodification. We ask, throughout, whether the fantasy of democracy has run its course or is more vital now than ever before.

All students are expected to participate in class discussion and attendance at every meeting is mandatory. Students must notify the professor of an unavoidable absence in advance. Students will write short ungraded reading response on all readings, posted to the Canvas Discussion forum the day before class. Five papers are required over the five-week session. The first four are 2-3 pages each, based on topics raised in that week's readings and class discussions; the fifth paper (final project) is 8 pages, based on a topic developed in consultation with the instructor. Late papers will not be accepted without prior permission. Details about the paper assignments will be provided in class. Each student will make two class presentations on topics of their choice related to course themes: the first, on a media representation of precarity; the second, on their final project.

Grades will be calculated as follows: class participation (20%); class presentations (15%); first four papers (10% each=40%); final paper (25%).

Required readings are on reserve at Bass Library and available for purchase at the Yale Bookstore:

Naomi Klein, *No is Not Enough: Resisting Trump's Shock Politics*, 2017
Christine Walley, *Exit Zero: Family and Class in Postindustrial Chicago*, 2013
J. D. Vance, *Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and a Culture in Crisis*, 2016
Carol Anderson, *White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide*, 2016
Susan Lepselter, *The Resonance of Unseen Things*, 2016
Arlie Hochschild, *Strangers in Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the Right*, 2016
Jason De Leon, *The Land of Open Graves: Living and Dying on the Migrant Trail*, 2015
Elizabeth Kolbert, *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History*, 2014

Course Outline

WEEK 1

Day 1: What is Precarity?

- Course Introduction
- Discuss: Student Perspectives
- Media Representations

Day 2: Precarity's Temporalities

- Discuss: Klein, *No Is Not Enough*
- Media Representations
- **Due: Assignment #1** (end of week)

WEEK 2

Day 1: Urban Precarity

- Discuss: Walley, *Exit Zero*
- Media Representations

Day 2: Rural Precarity

- Discuss: Vance, *Hillbilly Elegy*
- Media Representations
- **Due: Assignment #2** (end of week)

WEEK 3

Day 1: Precarity's Histories

- Discuss: Anderson, *White Rage*
- Media Representations

Day 2: Precarity's Futures

- Discuss: Lepselter, *Resonance of Unseen Things*
- Media Representations
- **Due: Assignment #3** (end of week)

WEEK 4

Day 1: Precarity's Disavowals

- Discuss: Hochschild, *Strangers in Their Own Land*
- Media Representations

Day 2: Precarity's Realities

- Discuss: De Leon, *Land of Open Graves*
- Media Representations
- **Due: Assignment #4** (end of week)

WEEK 5

Day 1: Planetary Precarity

- Discuss: Kolbert, *The Sixth Extinction*
- Media Representations

Day 2: Precarity Now

- Final Project Presentations
- Concluding Discussion
- **Due: Assignment #5** (end of week)