

University of Hartford

Spring 2022 Humanities Center Lecture Series

FEARING THE UNKNOWN: IRRATIONALITY, ANTI-POLITICS AND CONSPIRACY THEORIES



The University of Hartford Humanities Center Lecture Series for Spring 2022 focuses on the theme of “**Fearing the Unknown: Irrationality, Anti-Politics and Conspiracy Theories,**” developed and led by **Dr. Marco Cupolo**, Associate Professor of Hispanic Studies (A&S).

Three University of Hartford Humanities Center Faculty Fellows and three distinguished presenters will speak on **Tuesday evenings** from **5:00-6:00 p.m.** between February 1 and April 26 in the **Shaw Center (Hillyer Hall)** (unless otherwise noted).

All lectures are free and open to the public.

The series will explore how and why today’s political and social irrationalities have given rise to anti-politics and conspiracy theories. Talks will be given by experts in the fields of literary and film studies, ethnic studies, psychology, criminal justice, sociology, and political science.

February 1: “Why do People Believe in Conspiracies, Superstitions and Other Counterfactual Phenomena?” by **Dr. Jack Powell**, Humanities Center Faculty Fellow and Professor Psychology at the University of Hartford. Here, Dr. Powell will speak on the cognitive and motivational biases that come into play when individuals and groups come to accept conspiracy theories. These motivations, he will show, tend to include the need for individuals to believe in their ability to control events in their lives (viewing the world as “orderly and nonrandom”). As such, the talk will explore how this need for control and predictability through a belief in conspiracy theories is associated with feelings of powerlessness and alienation, a disaffection from the system, and a lack of trust in others.

March 1: “Arresting Social Change: The FBI’s Demonization of the Hartford Black Panthers” by **Dr. Al DiChiara**, Humanities Center Faculty Fellow and Associate Professor of Sociology and Criminal Justice at the University of Hartford. In his talk, Dr. DiChiara will address the FBI’s attempts to destroy the Hartford branch of the Black Panther Party in the late 1960s. Exploring the formation and organization of the Black Panthers in Connecticut, this talk will examine how the FBI’s war against them is an example of an “over-policing and surveillance society,” a main organizing social principle of contemporary advanced capitalism that, in turn, leads to an exclusive society that attempts to demonize difficult ideas and groups.

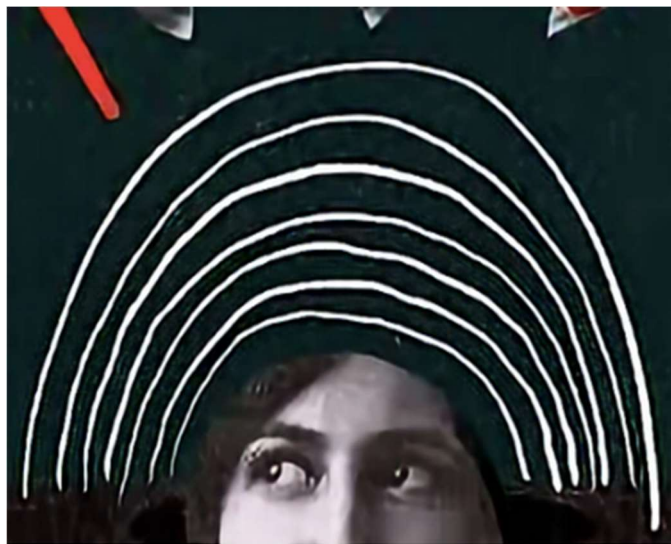
March 29: “Gender, Race, and Politics in *Pelo malo*, a Film by Mariana Rondón” by **Dr. Alicia B. Ríos**, Associate Professor of Spanish at Syracuse University. This talk will address the 2013 Venezuelan film, *Pelo malo/Bad Hair*, which takes place in a large, underprivileged Caracas neighborhood that played a relevant role in the consolidation of Hugo Chávez’s revolutionary movement and government. During this session, Dr. Ríos will speak to the racialized, sexualized and class aspects of the film, demonstrating

how it is difficult to deliver a conclusive opinion about the main characters and their actions. Given that their lives are in constant turmoil due to the poor conditions of their surroundings, they are impeded from having a clear sense of what is going on and, more importantly, what would be best for them to do.

April 5: “The Displacement of Gentrification” by **Dr. Kevin Beck**, Humanities Center Faculty Fellow and Assistant Professor of Sociology and Criminal Justice at the University of Hartford. In the 1960s, sociologist Ruth Glass coined the term gentrification to describe the arrival of middle-class residents to London’s working-class neighborhoods. The arrival of these newcomers, she noted, subsequently changed the character of the neighborhoods and displaced many longtime residents. Today, some scholars, politicians, and commentators use gentrification to refer to all that is wrong with contemporary cities. For others, gentrification has become synonymous with urban revitalization. What is often lost in today’s discussions of gentrification is the problem of residential displacement. Dr. Beck’s presentation will reorient debates over gentrification on the widespread problem of displacement.

April 12: “Polarization, Protests, and Political Change in Latin America: Students and New Political Leaders” by **Dr. María Pilar García-Guadilla**, Professor of Urban Planning, Political Science and Sustainable Development at the Universidad Simón Bolívar. From a qualitative, processual, dynamic and interdisciplinary approach, this talk will analyze the erosive impact of “pernicious” polarization, mobilization and protests on Latin American democracies. As students are the most credible socio-political actors according to polls, Dr. García-Guadilla will focus on how their role in organizing most protests over the last few years has allowed them to become the new leaders of political parties in the region.

April 26: “What’s Hate? Deconstructing Systems of Violence” by **Dr. Luis Duno-Gottberg**, Professor of Caribbean and Film Studies at Rice University. This talk will explore how hate can be an emotion, action, belief and ideology, manifesting itself with great passion or becoming so normalized that it is not even recognized as such (perhaps seen, instead, as an expression of “how things are”). By gathering strands from diverse disciplines, Dr. Duno-Gottberg will examine the unsettling question of “hatred” through scholarly works, literature, and visual culture dealing with prejudice, discrimination, extreme nationalistic movements, racism and genocide.



The Lecture Series on “Fearing the Unknown” in Spring 2022 is **open to all students, faculty, and staff, as well as members of the community**. Lectures are from **5:00-6:00 p.m.** in the **Shaw Center of Hillyer Hall** (unless otherwise noted) and are free and open to the public. The Humanities Center at the University of Hartford supports interdisciplinary scholarship focusing on the humanities through arts, sciences, technology, media, music, psychology, history, film, philosophy and literature. **For more information, contact Nicholas Ealy, Director, at ealy@hartford.edu, visit our [web page](#), or follow us on [Facebook](#).**