

# Understanding Antisemitism: Historical Roots and Contemporary Relevance

*Institute for Social Ecology Online Seminar*

Day/Time: Tuesdays 3-4:30 pm EST, May 5-19

Instructors:

Dr. Robert Ogman (Sociology, De Montfort University)

Dr. Sina Arnold (Sociology, Berlin Technical University)

Dr. Blair Taylor (Political Science, New School for Social Research)

Dr. Peter Staudenmaier (Marquette University, History)

**Course Description:** Among the forms of exclusion and domination that have plagued human societies since the rise of capitalism, antisemitism has played a particularly destructive role. Beginning with the emergence of modern antisemitism in nineteenth century Europe, this seminar will examine the development of antisemitic beliefs across a variety of cultural contexts and explore the social function of anti-Jewish sentiment under hierarchical conditions. We will discuss how and why antisemitic thinking and practice, from covert animosity to outright violence, affect both the established institutions of the social order and oppositional movements working against these institutions.

**Course format:** The course format is a participatory seminar comprising three thematic sessions. Each session begins with a short introduction of the texts and central issues by the instructors, followed by facilitated discussions among participants via Zoom video meeting. Participants are expected to complete the readings in advance of each seminar. We provide all required texts, available for download via the PowerSchool Learning course portal. There are no written assignments or grades; all participants receive a certificate of course completion.

## **May 5            Antisemitism: A Historical and Conceptual Introduction**

The course will begin with a discussion of the range of meanings associated with the term ‘antisemitism’ and an inquiry into the historical origins of this tenacious social phenomenon. We will examine the emergence of modern forms of antisemitism in nineteenth century Europe and take a critical look at several prominent attempts to explain the historical rise and persistence of antisemitism.

Video Lecture: Unit 1 with Peter Staudenmaier

Reading: Shulamit Volkov, “Antisemitism as a Cultural Code”

## **May 12            Antisemitism and Capitalism**

Continuing our investigation into the historical development of antisemitic movements and ideas and the concomitant development of critiques of antisemitism, we will consider

the ways in which social understanding of the meaning of antisemitism shifted in the wake of the genocide of European Jewry. We will attempt to broaden our analysis by reflecting on the underlying function of antisemitic attitudes within a hierarchical and heteronomous society, and assess the possible relevance of various forms of ‘secondary antisemitism’.

Video Lecture: Unit 3 with Rob Ogman

Reading: Werner Bonefeld. Notes on Antisemitism

Moishe Postone, “Anti-Semitism and National Socialism.”

## **May 19      Antisemitisms Left and Right**

Starting from the premise that antisemitic archetypes have played a constitutive role in several of the most powerful authoritarian systems that blighted the twentieth century, we will continue our inquiry by scrutinizing the simultaneous persistence of antisemitic assumptions and images within some sectors of the left milieu over the past century and a half. We will critically appraise the recent discourse on a ‘new antisemitism’ and its relevance to anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist politics, focusing on issues related to intersectionality and antizionism. This session will also focus on the role of antisemitism within contemporary far-right and white nationalist movements. We will discuss the relationship between racism and antisemitism within these movements as intertwined yet also distinct forms of oppression.

Video Lecture: Weeks 4 with Rob Ogman (and Unit 5 if you have time)

Reading: Sina Arnold and Blair Taylor. “Confronting an Invisible Racism: Antisemitism and the Left.”

Moishe Postone, “History and Helplessness”

Eric Ward, *Skin in the Game: How Antisemitism Animates White Nationalism.*”