

## **Understanding Antisemitism: Historical Roots and Contemporary Relevance**

*Institute for Social Ecology Online Seminar*

Day/Time: Wednesdays 1-2:30 pm ET, March 24-April 28

Instructors: Dr. Peter Staudenmaier (Marquette University, History)

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. Spencer Sunshine (Sociology, City University of New York)

**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 six 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.

### **March 24      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.

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

### **March 31      A Critical Theory of Antisemitism**

Through a close reading of a seminal text on “the limits of Enlightenment,” we will explore the religious, economic, psychological, political, and philosophical roots of European antisemitism, examining these factors against the background of contemporary historical accounts of the relationship between the Enlightenment and antisemitic thought as well as the relationship between capitalism and antisemitic practice.

Reading: Horkheimer and Adorno, “Elements of Antisemitism”

### **April 7      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'.

Reading: Moishe Postone, "Anti-Semitism and National Socialism."

**April 14      Antisemitism and the Contemporary Left: Antizionism and Intersectionality**

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.

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

Moishe Postone, "History and Helplessness"

**April 21      Contemporary Right Antisemitism**

This session focuses 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.

Readings: Adolph Hitler. "Why We Are Antisemites." 1920 speech.

Ruth Wodak, "The Radical Right and Antisemitism."

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

**April 28      Countering Antisemitism**

After spending 5 weeks focusing on the theory and practice of antisemitism in various forms, this session is dedicated to exploring how to combat it. We will look at different strategies, interventions, and projects aimed at countering antisemitism within movements on the left and right, as well as in society at large.