

## **FASCISM: THEORIES, PRACTICES, AND REACTIONS**

Fascism, its historical roots, ideas, practices, and the forms of opposition to it, have been the subjects of intense controversy for over a century. An exploration of these issues is by no means out of date, given the growth of forces that many associate with fascism around the world today. A better understanding of the dynamic of such forces, both historical and current, as well as the opposition to them, will hopefully help us to evaluate what may lie ahead.

Fascism is arguably the most researched and theorized political movement of the twentieth and so far the twenty-first century, even including Soviet Communism. The problem is that fascism does not fit into any prior system of classifying movements and states. Moreover, it took root in different countries with different histories and cultures, meaning that its “looks” varied, as did movements of opposition to it. Were Hitler, Mussolini, Franco and Peron really fascist? Is the Ku Klux Klan an example of fascism? The “Alt-Right”? In a short five weeks we will grapple with these and other cases as we attempt to clarify our own understanding of this phenomenon.

I will begin each session in this course with a short presentation providing background on some aspect of the topic followed by participants’ questions and discussion. I expect that participants will not be neutral but will be respectful of others’ views.

Among the issues that we will explore are these:

1. Fascism in comparison to other authoritarian movements (the problem of definition).
2. Historical, cultural, and economic factors in the rise of fascism.
3. Fascism’s popularity among different sectors of the population. The psychological or personality aspects and class backgrounds of fascism’s followers and leaders.
4. The role of racism and/or ethno-nationalism, including anti-Semitism.
5. The opposition to fascism from Right to Left.

As we move forward, I will provide short pieces per email and suggest further readings available online. Participants’ suggestions will be welcome. A good overview text is Robert O. Paxton’s *The Anatomy of Fascism* (Vintage paperback, 2005); used copies are available on Amazon for \$6-12.00. Please try to read Ch. 8, “What Is Fascism” in preparation for our first session.

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**Leader:** Martin (Marty) Oppenheimer. Marty and his family were refugees from Nazi Germany in 1937. His MA essay from Columbia University was on the Hitler Movement. His doctoral dissertation from the University of Pennsylvania was on the Southern Sit-In Movement of 1960. He is emeritus professor of sociology at Rutgers University.

**Mondays:** 10:00 a.m. to noon, 6 weeks: October 5 through November 9

**Maximum:** 12 seats