

THE SOCIOLOGY AND PSYCHOLOGY OF OPPRESSION

Why, in the twenty-first century, do individuals and groups of people willingly oppress others, even including mass murder? What circumstances lead to movements that promote bigotry, scapegoating, and violence against those who are “different”? How do individuals and groups cope with and fight back against oppressive circumstances? We will examine oppression’s sociological and psychological dimensions, including:

How do people develop and justify their prejudices, hatreds and xenophobia (psychology)?
How does the distribution of resources impact individuals and groups of people (economics)?
What are the functions of oppression for different social institutions (sociology)?
Why are racism and anti-Semitism so deeply rooted in society (history)?
How do different nations “deal” with their ethnic minority populations?
How do individuals and groups fight back (social movements)?
How can we understand movements that react against or attempt to overcome oppression?

Our course is seminar style. I will begin each session with your questions and comments and, if appropriate, make a short presentation providing background on some aspect of our subject. As soon as I have an email list, I will send out some short articles or refer you to pieces available online, as you prepare for our first session. For those who want to go more deeply into the psychological dimension, Gordon Allport’s classic *The Nature of Prejudice* (1954) does so. Similarly, for sociological background, try *Poor People’s Movements* by Piven and Cloward (1979). These are not required. I will send out a more extensive reading list later. Participants’ suggestions will be welcome at all times.

LEADER: Martin Oppenheimer is Professor Emeritus of Sociology, Rutgers University, where his field was political sociology. He taught this course as a seminar at the University of Pennsylvania several years ago.

FORMAT: Virtual

MAXIMUM: 14

WEDNESDAYS 10:00 a.m. to noon 6 sessions starting September 28 through November 9

No class on October 5