

THE FIVE FACES OF OPPRESSION: PARTICIPANT WORKSHEET
(ADAPTED FROM TDSJ2 APPENDIX 11B)

Faces of Oppression	Example of RO	Example of Intersections with other “isms”
Exploitation: the process by which the results of the labor of one social group is transferred for the benefit of another		
Marginalization: the process by which people whom the labor system cannot or will not use, are expelled from or denied useful or productive participation in economic and social life, often resulting in material deprivation and dependency		
Powerlessness: inability to participate in making decisions that affect the conditions of one’s lives and actions; lacking in authority, status, and sense of self; limited concrete opportunities to develop and exercise one’s capacities		
Cultural imperialism: the process by which the dominant symbols, activities, or meanings of a society reinforce the perspective of a dominant group while making invisible, stereotyped, or marked as “other” the perspectives of subordinate or targeted groups. Includes the presumed universality of the dominant group’s experience, culture and religion		
Violence: random, unprovoked attacks against members of (targeted or subordinated) social groups and their property, with the primary motivation to damage, humiliate or terrorize, and in a social context in which this violence is tolerated or even enabled by accepted institutional and social practices		

BACKGROUND

According to Young (Chapter 1, #5), the five faces of oppression — exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, violence — “function as criteria for determining whether individuals and groups are oppressed” so that “the presence of any of these five conditions is sufficient for calling a group oppressed.” Some examples of these five faces within religious oppression include:

1. The *exploitation* of black slave labor rationalized in part by “heathen” African religious practices;
2. The *marginalization* of denominations outside the Protestant mainstream (Amish, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mormons, Seventh Day Adventists);
3. The political and legal *powerlessness* of Japanese American Buddhists to resist or avoid forced internment during World War II;
4. The *cultural imperialism* experienced by Native American Indians relocated onto reservations and forcibly “assimilated” by Christian denominational mission boarding schools;
5. The *violence* visited upon individual Arab and South Asian Americans in the rapid acceleration of harassment and hate crimes from the mid-1970s up to and following 9/11.

Here are some further examples developed from the lecture material that focuses on antisemitism:

- Exploitation: Jews as Christian Europe's "bankers" (beginning of Capitalism's "usury"), followed by denunciation & scapegoating of Jews' role with money
- Marginalization: Jews in Christian Europe kept out of worker's "guilds" and not permitted to own land; Jews in Christian U.S. kept to "quotas" in colleges and medical schools; Jews in Nazi Germany removed from Universities and professions
- Powerlessness: Jews not allowed citizenship in Christian European countries (until end of 18th century); Jews "marked" by special clothes, hats, armbands in medieval Christian Europe and Islamic North Africa
- Cultural Imperialism: Calendar marked by "B.C." and "A.D." (or BCE & CE) with years running forward or backward from birth of Christ; Holidays and Sunday as "day of rest" follows Christian calendar; Separation of politics from religion called "separation of *Church* and State"; Forced conversions to Christianity and continued justifications for Christian missions to Jews
- Violence and Threats of Violence: Massacres of Jews during Crusades; Polish and Russian pogroms; Nazi extermination camps; Lynching of Leo Frank

SETTING UP THE ACTIVITY

Present an overview of Young's article "The Five Faces of Oppression" (Chapter 1, #6) and emphasize that this is one of several different conceptual organizers that focus on different aspects of oppression. This organizer enables participants to focus on individual or group examples of exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence that characterize religious oppression.

Ask participants to form five work groups (one for each of the five faces) or, if the whole group is too small or too large, create multiple groups of three to five participants to talk about the "faces" that are most striking for them.

Distribute copies of the Participant Worksheet printed above, so that each small group or each participant has a copy with two columns of blank cells for examples to be filled in by them. Review the worksheet with them to address any questions.

After 20 minutes of small group activity, ask participants to return to the whole group. Post a large copy of the matrix (newsprint or chalkboard) and fill in the empty boxes with as many examples as participants provide. (Alternatively, groups can post their sheets in a gallery and walk around the room to read all of the composite lists.)

After the posted matrix has been completely filled in, conduct a whole group discussion that raises questions such as,

- Have any targeted religious groups been left out of these examples?
- Do targeted religious groups experience different "faces" of religious oppression?
- Do targeted religious groups experience specific "faces" differently?
- Do you think there are commonalities among the experiences of targeted religious groups of these "faces" of religious oppression