

Jesus - Religion 840:307
Rutgers University
Fall 2014

Professor: Matthew Ketchum

Chat Time(s): TBD

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Course Description

A 1965 Hollywood film about the life of Jesus of Nazareth is titled “The Greatest Story Ever Told.” This is a bold claim for a movie about a Jewish peasant who lived 2000 years ago. However, the film’s boisterous title is reflective of the formative role this Jesus has played in Western history up to our present day. The figure of Jesus has haunted the early formations of the Christian movement, theological controversies hundreds of years later, and countless wars fought in recent centuries. No matter one’s own personal beliefs about Jesus, it is impossible to deny his historical importance.

This course is a study of the many varied constructions of Jesus of Nazareth that have occurred throughout history, both in the New Testament and elsewhere. The class will examine how Jesus’ earliest followers made sense of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus in ways that resulted in a diverse array of gospels and other ancient texts. We will also examine depictions of Jesus in other media (literature, art, film, etc.) and the complex ways they engage with (or don’t) these early sources.

Throughout the course, we will discuss and analyze the political stakes of these many manifestations of Jesus. What can we learn about the authors and/or communities that produced and then read the earliest stories of Jesus’ life and teachings? Why might one text portray Jesus as very human, while another portrays him as more divine? Why do scholarly reconstructions of the historical person of Jesus differ so widely? What roles have these varying portraits of Jesus played in different social, ethical, and political movements throughout history? We will explore these questions and more as we discover no portrayal of Jesus is neutral, that his legacy has been and always be an ever-changing element of Western society.

Course Goals

After completing this course, students should have gained:

- Familiarity with the many diverse depictions of Jesus of Nazareth, both found in the New Testament and elsewhere (in religious texts outside the canon, in art, literature, films, scholarship, pop culture, etc.).
- The ability to compare, contrast, and analyze different portrayals of Jesus (how these portrayals intersect with issues of history, politics, ethics, theology, gender, race, etc.).

- Understanding the contents, arguments, and stakes of critical gospel and Historical Jesus scholarship.
- Understanding the role that context and social location play not only in the production of depictions of Jesus, but also in interpretations of these depictions.

Instructional Methods

The teaching of this course is done primarily through readings, recorded lectures, discussions on the forum and in chats, and a variety of media.

Course Requirements and Grade Distribution

- *Complete all assigned readings.* Students should complete all of a week's assigned readings (from the textbook and any additional readings posted to the course website) before the posting deadline for that week.
- *Compose and participate in all assigned postings.* Students are expected to post two critical questions, based on the course readings, every other week. These must be posted by noon on the day before the week's chat. Those students who do not post critical questions should respond to at least one of their colleague's posts before the chat. (20% of final grade).
- *Attend and participate in all assigned chats.* Each week students will attend a one-hour chat session where they will discuss the readings and themes of the course with the professor. (20% of final grade).
- *Complete all assigned writing assignments.* Throughout the course, there will be two required writing assignments. 1) An obituary of Jesus of Nazareth. 2) An analysis of a "Jesus artifact." The details of these assignments will be available on Sakai. (60% of final grade combined)

Required Textbooks

- Levine, Amy-Jill. *The Misunderstood Jew: The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus*. New York: HarperOne. 2006. ISBN 9780061137785
- Prothero, Stephen. *American Jesus: How the Son of God Became a National Icon*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 2003. ISBN 9780374529567
- *Harper Collins Study Bible – New Revised Standard Edition*. New York: HarperOne. 2006. ISBN 9780060786847

Course Schedule

Every week will have the following format: Complete all readings. Post two critical questions on Sakai every other week [see instructions above] by noon on the day before that week's chat. Read and respond to your colleagues postings before our chat sessions on TBD.

Week One – September 1-5 – Introduction to the Course

- READ: N/A

Week Two – September 8-11 – The Greco-Roman World

- READ:
 - (Online) Harold Attridge and L. Michael White, "Hellenistic Culture"

- (Online) Marianne Palmer Bonz, “Religion in the Roman World”

Week Three – September 15-19 – Judaism in Antiquity

- READ:
 - Levine 1-52

Week Four – September 22-26 – Jesus in the Letters of Paul

- READ:
 - (Online) Selections from the writings of the Apostle Paul
 - Prothero 1-42
 - Levine 53-86

Week Five – September 29-October 3 – Jesus in the Gospels (Mark)

- READ:
 - The Gospel of Mark
 - (Online) Daniel Boyarin, *The Jewish Gospels: The Story of the Jewish Christ*, New York: New Press, pp. 25-70.

Week Six – October 6-10 – Jesus in the Gospels (Matthew)

- READ:
 - The Gospel of Matthew
 - Levine 87-117

Week Seven – October 13-17 – Jesus in the Gospels (Luke)

- READ:
 - The Gospel of Luke
 - (Online) *Suetonius* on the birth of Augustus

Week Eight – October 20-24 – Jesus in the Gospels (John)

- READ:
 - The Gospel of John
 - Levine 119-166

Week Nine – October 27-31 – The Cosmic Jesus (Revelation)

- READ:
 - The Revelation of John
 - (Online) Moore, Stephen D. *God’s Beauty Parlor: And Other Queer Spaces in and Around the Bible*. Stanford, Calif: StanfordUniversity Press, 2001, pp. 173-200.

Week Ten – November 3-7 – Jesus in Other Gospels

- READ:
 - The Gospel of Thomas
 - The Gospel of Mary
 - Prothero 56-64, 87-123

- (Online) Jane Schaberg with Melanie Johnson-DeBaufre, *Mary Magdalene Understood*. Continuum, 2006, pp. 98-126.

Week Eleven – November 10-14 – Jesus in the Talmud and Quran

- READ:
 - (Online) Selections from the Talmud
 - (Online) Selections from the Qur'an
 - (Online) Peter Schafer, *Jesus in the Talmud*. Princeton University Press, 2007, pp. TBD.
 - (Online) Tarif Khalidi, *The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature*. Harvard University Press, 2001, pp. 3-17.

Week Twelve – November 17-21 – Jesus And Identity Politics

- READ:
 - Prothero 200-228
 - (Online) Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *Jesus and the Politics of Interpretation*. New York: Continuum, 2000, pp. TBD.
 - (Online) Chandra Johnson, “Should Christians Boycott ‘Black Jesus’ or Try to Learn from it?”

Week Thirteen – November 24-28 – Thanksgiving, Watch a movie

- READ:
 - Prothero 124-157
 - (Online) Adele Reinhartz, *Jesus of Hollywood*, New York: Oxford, 2007, pp. 1-20, 251-256.

Week Fourteen – December 1-5 – Wrap Up

- READ:
 - Prothero 291-304
 - Levine 215-228

Policies

Religious Holidays:

It is University policy (University Regulation on Attendance, Book 2, 2.47B, formerly 60.14f) to excuse without penalty students who are absent from class because of religious observance, and to allow the make-up of work missed because of such absence. Examinations and special required out-of-class activities shall ordinarily not be scheduled on those days when religiously observant students refrain from participating in secular activities. Absences for reasons of religious obligation shall not be counted for purposes of reporting. *Students are advised to provide timely notification to instructors about necessary absences for religious observances and are responsible for making up the work or exams according to an agreed-upon schedule.*

Disabilities:

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments (ADAA) of 2008, and Sections 504 and 508 mandate that reasonable accommodations be provided for qualified students with disabilities. If a student has a disability and may require some type of instructional and/or examination accommodation, please contact the instructor early in the semester so that she can provide or facilitate in providing necessary accommodations. In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, a student with a disability must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/documentation-guidelines>. The student must register with the Office of Disability Services. To begin this process, please complete the Registration form on the ODS web site at: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/registration-form>.

Academic Integrity:

Students will be expected to adhere to the University policy on Academic Integrity (available online here: http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/files/documents/AI_Policy_9_01_2011.pdf), regarding plagiarism, cheating, academic sabotage, etc.