

Race and Judaism

RELG388/491U



SPRING SEMESTER 2011

Are Jews white? Is anti-Semitism racist? Is Zionism racism? Is Judaism just a religion? This course investigates the concept of race and the phenomena of racism and anti-Semitism as they relate to Jewish history, religion, politics, and culture. We will explore how Jews and non-Jews have created identity and how they understood the many ways of being Jewish. We will try to seek answers to the seemingly simple question of who is a Jew? What makes someone a Jew? Who gets to decide? Finally, we will address the relationships between Jews and other groups, primarily in the United States and Israel. We will engage in critical readings of primary texts, histories, op-eds, websites, testimonies, fiction, and film.

Learning objectives

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Demonstrate a general understanding of “Judaism”
- Demonstrate comprehension of the history of “race” and racism – major figures, events, and arguments
- Engage in complex, nuanced discussion and critical writing with respect to the basics of Jewish history, race theories, and the diversity of Jewish experience.

Grade breakdown:

- Participation (online quizzes, blogposts, in-class writing assignments etc.): 25%
- Syllabus quiz: 5% (January 12)
- 1 Midterms: 20%
- 5-page research paper: 25%
- Final: 25%

Grading scale: 100-90=A; 86-89=B+; 80-85=B; 76-79=C+; 70-75=C; 66-69=D+; 60-65=D; < 59 =F

Reading schedule

Introduction:

- What is distinctive about Judaism?
- cursory History of Jews and Judaism
- American Beginnings

- What was first: racism or slavery?

Jewish identity from antiquity and modernity

- Creation (Ham)
- Rabbinic Judaism (matrilineal descent)
- Ritual Murder Accusations and Host Desecrations
- Popular depictions
- Martin Luther
- The Dreyfuss Affair

Rise of modern anti-Semitism and racism

- Protocols of the Elders of Zion and KKK
- Nazism (scaling the body)
- Confronting the Holocaust
- What is Zionism. Is Zionism Racism?
- Race in Israel

Race vs. Religion

- *Who's a Jew? Matrilinear/Patrilinial descent*
- "Chosenness" and "Jewish Genius"
- Shaping the body: Nosejobs
- Jews and the allure of the Non-Jew

Jews and Blacks

- Jews and the Civil Rights Movement
- Jews are/of color