

# **The Complete Story: Religion and Race in Global Non-Fiction Programming**

**Barbara Selznick**

**University of Arizona**

## **Abstract**

This essay examines the intersection of media globalization, race and religion. Focusing on the BBC/Discovery Channel's documentary *Jesus: The Complete Story*, the essay argues that the production of documentaries by global television networks such as Discovery necessitates rethinking Eurocentric representations of iconic figures like Jesus Christ. Ultimately, discourses of nationalism and race that have been tied to religious imagery are increasingly being replaced by discourses of science and technology in order to appeal to international audiences.

## **Introduction**

"I'm not a religious person, but this series is not about belief, it's about fact." Jeremy Bowen (qtd. in Wells, 2001)

Jeremy Bowen, the narrator for the British documentary *Son of God*, created controversy in the U.K. in 2001 when he repeatedly, and publicly, proclaimed that he was not a believer. Rather, the former Middle East reporter for the BBC claimed that he was drawn to *Son of God* for its historical and scientific information (Webb, 2005). Some Christians in the UK expressed concerns about the involvement of a non-religious man with this documentary on Christ, particularly since the publicity materials surrounding the documentary explained that the series would question several stories of the Gospel. When the documentary aired in the United States on the Discovery Channel as *Jesus: The Complete Story*, Bowen's narration was replaced with that of American actor Tom Hodgkins. This change appears to have eliminated the majority of controversy surrounding the documentary, despite the best efforts of co-producers BBC and Discovery Communications to sensationalize the program.<sup>1</sup>

Both the BBC and Discovery focused their promotional campaigns on the science and technology that went into the program, with the highlight of the publicity being a computer generated image of what Jesus might have actually looked like. Stories on both the BBC and Discovery web sites focused on this “scientific breakthrough” and reported the potential controversy that a “true” rendering of the Christ of history (as opposed to the Christ of faith) might cause (“BBC Unveils Hi-Tech Jesus,” 2001; Lorenzi, 2001; Webb 2001; “Why Do We Think Christ Was White?,” 2001). The “problem” the producers expected with the rendering was that it did not match the white, blue-eyed and noble image of Christ that is popular in most of the Western world. Instead, the Discovery web site explains that archaeological, forensic and historical scholars created a “swarthy, coarse, vacant-eyed, short haired man” as a historically “accurate” model for Christ (Lorenzi, 2001). The controversy over the rendering of Christ, however, never seemed to come. Although some press outlets in the U.S. ran stories about the documentary’s physical depiction of Christ, many did not even review the program, and some that did simply ran edited versions of the Associated Press’ short news item about the documentary.<sup>2</sup>

The lack of protest to the representation of Christ is at the same time both surprising and predictable. Only four years earlier, a black man cast as Christ in a New Jersey passion play received death threats (“Black Jesus in Union City,” 1997). So, wouldn’t a depiction of Christ as a Middle Eastern peasant generate at least a mild reaction? At the same time, however, Discovery, as a global media conglomerate would not be expected to connect itself with controversial material. This essay will explore these contradictory reactions by examining two primary questions surrounding the racial representation of Christ in *Jesus: The Complete Story*. First, why would Discovery get involved with the production of a documentary that had the potential to cause such a controversy? Second, how did the documentary, despite the overt promotion of its potentially divisive representation, avoid controversy? To answer these questions I will first consider why Jesus’ race – and its representation in visual media – is significant both culturally and politically. I will then tie these notions of Christ and race to the content and economics of contemporary televisual documentary. Finally, I will focus on *Jesus: The Complete Story* to see how it

presents issues of representation and race in a way that diffuses controversy. Ultimately, I will argue that the production of global documentaries or what is now termed non-fiction entertainment, by global television networks such as Discovery necessitates a rethinking of Eurocentric representations of iconic figures like Christ. Furthermore, as is seen in *Jesus: The Complete Story*, discourses of nationalism and race that have been tied to religious imagery are increasingly being replaced by discourses of science and technology in order to appeal to international audiences.

### **Jesus and Race**

Any racialized understanding of Christ is connected to his depiction in various art forms. Since the Gospels do not describe Christ's physical appearance, it is only through representations that we have any sense of what Christ may have looked like. Artistic representations of Christ did not exist for a long time, since Jews, Christ's first followers, do not believe in creating images of God ("Why Do We Think Christ Was White?," 2001). Some of the earliest representations of Christ in paintings, dating around the 4<sup>th</sup> century, depicted him in widely divergent ways in terms of hair, ethnicity and clothing. With the only caveat being that Jesus' face had to be human, the Church's position at this time tended to be that the impossibility of ever really knowing what Christ looked like allows for a variety of possible artistic images (Jensen, 2003).

When Christianity moved into Western Europe in the early Middle Ages, however, Christ was increasingly depicted as a blond Aryan (Jenkins, 2002). The Crusades further encouraged an association of Christ with whiteness, since non-whites were considered non-believers (Why Do We Think Christ Was White?," 2001). Western artists such as DaVinci and Michelangelo promoted the idea of Christ as white, as did later U.S. artists. The famous "Head of Christ" paintings first by Heinrich Hofmann in the late 1800s and then, more popularly, by Warner Sallman in 1940 reinforced the typical Western depiction of Christ: young, white, blue-eyes, fine features, long thin face, flowing hair and long beard. Sallman's image (Figure 1) has been credited with creating the national iconic image of Christ in the United States (Prothero, 2003).

QuickTime™ and a  
TIFF (Uncompressed) decompresso  
are needed to see this picture.

(Figure 1)

The depiction of Christ as white had at least two effects on international culture and politics. First, in the Western world, a white Christ provided a figure with which the dominant members of society could identify (Raab, 1997, p. 395). Second, imagining Christ as white reaffirmed the association of whiteness with power and goodness and imbued whiteness with “cultural privilege and power” (Raab, 1997, p. 398).

The representation of Christ as white becomes even more significant when Christianity is understood in relation to nationalism and imperialism. The Romans, for example, used the ideals of Christianity to build their empire. As Marimba Ani writes, “the synthesis [between Roman Imperialism and Christianity] made political sense.... The two ideologies, put to the service of one cultural group and espousing compatible values and objectives worked hand in hand, to command the same allegiance, to conquer the same world” (qtd. in Malhotra, 2004). According to Eric Hobsbawm (1990), religion had the ability to break down national and ethnic differences in colonized nations and unite people under the heading of Christianity. Furthermore, holy icons, like the image of Christ, “represent the symbols and rituals or common collective practices which alone give a palpable reality to an otherwise imaginary community” (Hobsbawm, 1990, p. 71). So, Hobsbawm explains, by fusing Christianity with the Roman Empire around an image of Christ that provided the Romans with the cultural power, Christianity effectively unified different nations into one Christian Roman Empire.

With the fall of the Roman Empire, white European Christianity developed as a justification for Western domination. Western European countries were superior not only

because they were white but also because they were Christian. As whiteness, Christianity and empire conflated, the whiteness of Christ became politically important. Benedict Anderson (1998) writes, in the process of colonization, “official nationalism was typically a response on the part of threatened dynastic and aristocratic groups – upper classes – to popular vernacular nationalism. Colonial racism was a major element in that conception of ‘Empire’” (p. 150). The association of Christianity with whiteness and both whiteness and Christianity with Western Europe solidified the supposed superiority of the colonizing countries. By encouraging the conversion of colonized people to Christianity and continuing to remind them that they were not of divine lineage, the dominated came to accept their domination. Following World War II the unspoken yet forceful association of Christianity and whiteness grew even more significant. As European colonialism collapsed, Christian superiority became a stand-in for whiteness in discourses about uplift and modernizing (Malhotra, 2004). Christianity, furthermore, was left behind in the nations colonized; a seed planted and left to grow. Philip Jenkins (2002) writes, “While the laws of individual nations lasted only as long as the nations themselves, Christendom offered a higher set of standards and mores that alone could claim to be universal.” Christianity continued to set standards and ideals – including those of the superiority of whiteness.

The conflation of Christianity and whiteness also operated to subjugate Black people in the United States. The power of the image of Christ for African Americans can be seen in the following quote from Reverend Henry McNeal Turner, a bishop for the African Methodist Episcopal Church and an early supporter of the “Back to Africa” movement. He wrote in the church’s journal *Voice of Missions* in 1898:

Every race of people since time began who have attempted to describe their God by words, or by paintings, or by carvings, or by any other form or figure, have conveyed the idea that the God who made them and shaped their destinies was symbolized in themselves, and why should not the Negro believe that he resembles God as much so as other people? We do not believe that there is any hope for a race of people who do not believe that they look like God. (qtd. in Prothero, 2003, p. 214)

This powerful commentary on the significance of images of Christ reflects an idea mainly espoused by activists. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century most Black Christians in the U.S. saw Jesus as white. Additionally, although according to Stephen Prothero (2003) most African American artists still picture Jesus as white, the civil rights movement encouraged an increased number of Black images of Christ to the U.S.. And, around the world, nationalistic and ethnic movements led to the depiction of localized images of Christ. A unified image of Christ “collapsed in the face of the overwhelming power of secular nationalism” (Jenkins, 2002). In fact in 2000, the *National Catholic Reporter* chose a painting of a Black Christ as its Millennial Christ image, a move that brought a fair amount of criticism (Grace, 2000).

Not surprisingly, within mainstream, Western film and television, the dominant image of Christ still prevails. The history of Christ’s representations in films and television is well-documented elsewhere, and a full review of this material is beyond the scope of this essay.<sup>3</sup> What I will illustrate, however, is that the films and television programs coming out of the Western world (primarily the U.S.) have continued to mobilize the image of Christ as white.

Discussions of Christ’s depictions in the visual media differentiate between those representations that center on the Christ of history and those that focus on the Christ of faith, suggesting that there is a distinction between focusing on the accuracy of Jesus’ life and the spirituality of his life. Interestingly, regardless of the goal of the text (“accuracy” or “spirituality”), most films and television programs continue to depict Christ as a white, blue-eyed, tall, thin, and fine-featured man, usually with some kind of beard (often long), and long hair. Some of the more famous films that depict Christ in either a spiritual or stylized manner include *King of Kings* (Ray, 1961), *The Greatest Story Every Told* (Stevens, 1965), *Jesus Christ Superstar* (Jewison, 1973), *The Last Temptation of Christ* (Scorsese, 1988), and, most recently, *The Passion of the Christ* (Gibson, 2004). All of these Christs are white, and most have blue eyes. Even *The Passion of the Christ*, which is spoken in Aramaic and Latin in order to lend the film an air of historical accuracy, starred an actor who embodied the traditional Western representation of Christ. On the

other hand, *Jesus of Nazareth* (1977) is frequently held up as an example of a more “researched” story of the historical Christ. A co-production between RAI (Italian) television and British producer Lew Grade, Franco Zeffirelli’s 1977 six-hour television version of Jesus’ life reached for historical accuracy in its production. For this miniseries historians (some of whom did not actually believe in Christianity) were used as consultants. Additionally, the program included details about Jewish religious practices in which Christ participated and focused on the political context of Jesus’ life as he attempted to negotiate the power of both the Romans and the established Jewish clergy (Forshey, 1992). At the same time, however, Robert Powell, a white, British man with blue eyes, portrayed Christ.

Although produced in different countries at different times, all of these films – with the possible exception of *Jesus of Nazareth* and *The Passion of the Christ*<sup>4</sup> – emerged from a political economic context that favored domestic audiences over international viewers. While all of these films were undoubtedly intended for international distribution, the force of globalization that would emerge in the 1990s had not yet reached the film industry. By the time the Discovery Channel became a major player in the television industry, the rising costs of production, the push toward international partnerships as a way to finance programs and the burgeoning of international markets all contributed to the growing importance and dependence on international audiences and advertisers. Global media corporations such as Discovery (and increasingly the BBC) now operate in a changed economic context, opening up space for, and perhaps even requiring, different kinds of representations.

### The Documentary and the Global Imagination

The 1990s saw a resurgence of television documentaries, mainly due to the rise of cable (Haley, 1997). Networks such as the Discovery Channel, TLC, A&E and the History Channel opened up significant opportunities for documentaries on a variety of subjects, primarily historical and scientific. Many of these new networks reached overseas, either directly by running networks in other countries or by sharing content with the slew of new stations. As Harvey Solomon (1998) explains, the popularity of historical

documentaries in the U.S. was “mirrored by a similar surge overseas, where the international interest not only helps with co-financing but increases the pool of potential subjects” (p. 6). The documentaries produced for the new cable channels, however, were quite different than documentaries of the past. Rather than focusing on political or social issues, most of these documentaries fell into the category of what is now frequently termed “non-fiction entertainment.”

In the early 1960s, Michael Curtin (1995) explains, the U.S. exported a good number of documentaries overseas. The broadcast networks sold documentaries abroad both to illustrate the quality of U.S. programming, thus easing criticisms of U.S. fictional series, and to appease the U.S. government, which saw potential in documentaries as a tool by which to spread the ideals of democracy (Curtin, 1995). Global television was considered a way to unify the Free World around pro-American ideologies. Documentaries like *Brazil: The Rude Awakening* (CBS, 1961) and *Angola: Journey to War* (NBC, 1961) were particularly viewed as a powerful means of communication to potential partners in the Cold War.

In the era of globalization, however, the function of the global documentary is conceived of quite differently. In an attempt to appeal to international audiences and advertisers, according to Elfriede Fursich (2003), global “non-fiction entertainment” programs tend to be (at least overtly) non-critical and non-political. These programs, she writes, must be “international enough to generate wide sales but also ‘neutral’ enough (not reflecting or upsetting specific national interests, tastes or themes) to appeal to a global audience” (Fursich, 2003, p. 137-138). Science, nature, travel and health are subjects that easily generate this kind of universal appeal, as long as they are “non-offensive, non-political, non-investigative or culturally constrained” (Fursich, 2003, p. 145). The goal of global documentaries, then, is to focus on a subject that is appealing enough to generate viewer interest, but not too culturally specific or overtly tied to any one nation. This balancing act can be particularly complicated when it comes to depicting historical subjects, since history is frequently nationalistic in terms of its subject and in terms of the “truths” that are told. To create a historical documentary for the international audience producers must

find subjects that are of universal interest yet keep from providing one national version of the truth. The Discovery Channel counted on *Jesus: The Complete Story* to provide such content.

Discovery Communications, Inc. is one of the most prominent producers of global non-fiction entertainment. With operations in over 160 countries, the company currently owns or co-owns over 90 networks, including Discovery Channel (which has numerous versions including Discovery Espanol, Discovery International, Discovery Asia and Discovery Middle East), TLC, Animal Planet and BBC America ([www.discovery.com](http://www.discovery.com)). The shareholders of Discovery Communication include Discovery's founder, John S. Hendricks along with three of the most powerful media companies in the U.S. (Liberty Media, Cox Communications and Advance/Newhouse Communications) ([www.discovery.com](http://www.discovery.com)). Discovery's international popularity is quite strong, as evidenced by the fact that in the late 1990s Discovery became one of the few cable channels to show a profit on its international operations. As Fursich explains, Discovery is a company that relies on international programs. The channel does not "glocalize" its programming but produces programs for the global audience. Fursich (2003) writes:

By emphasizing the localizing or 'glocalizing' strategies of transnational media conglomerations over the last few years, international communication scholars tended to overlook the fact that there are still companies such as Discovery that intentionally rely on global content and programming as their core product. Beyond inexpensive voice-over changes in different languages, Discovery programs are from the outset produced to work across borders, Discovery's content is global; only its promotions tend to be local (p. 148).

Discovery's product is generally bought from independent producers or co-produced by Discovery, frequently with companies from other countries (Fursich, 2003). Discovery's 1998 agreement with the BBC represents its most high-profile international agreement. According to the deal, Discovery and the BBC would co-produce programs and create new cable channels together (such as BBC America). Discovery also gained the right of

first refusal for both co-financing and U.S. airings of all new BBC documentaries (Mifflin, 1998).<sup>5</sup>

The deal between BBC and Discovery was considered an important opportunity for both organizations, although some critics bristled at the spread of Discovery's documentary techniques to the BBC. One British critic likened Discovery to lead in the drinking water. Discovery, he said, would drive British documentaries into "a state of imbecility" while making them "taste better" (Sutcliffe, 2001, p. 14). Along with a critique of Discovery's reliance on sensationalism and dramatization of somewhat frivolous subjects, another consistent criticism of Discovery is its tendency to create documentaries within a "safe, quality environment" (Berger, 1995, p. 16). *Washington Post* television critic Tom Shales wrote, "they [Discovery's documentaries] tend to be apolitical, and they shy away from anything that may breed controversy" (qtd. in Berger, 1995, p. 16).

It is perhaps surprising, then, that Discovery agreed to co-produce with the BBC a documentary about the "true" story of Christ, a topic that could potentially generate a great deal of controversy. The subject, however, is also a wonderfully universal one that many people around the world, regardless of their religions, may find interesting. Christianity, furthermore, is a growing religion, especially in Latin America, Asia and Africa (Jenkins, 2002). Discovery might have been thinking of this documentary as a means by which to attract audiences throughout the world.

### *Jesus: The Complete Story*

*Jesus: The Complete Story* premiered in the United States on Easter Sunday (April 15<sup>th</sup>) 2001.<sup>6</sup> The three-hour documentary, which was broken up into three parts, cost 1.5 million pounds – approximately \$2.8 million (Wells, 2001). According to reports, *Jesus: The Complete Story* intended to focus on "facts and theories that both back up and challenge common beliefs about Jesus" (Zad, 2001, p. Y04) and it was an "effort at a strictly scientific investigation into the Messiah of Christendom" ("Documentary Hypothesizes," 2001, p. 7). This program, which explores the Christ of history, utilizes

scholarship, science and technology to both question and support the stories of the Gospels.

One *Washington Times* reviewer observed, while some of the theories may “ruffle the feathers of some Christians who are more fundamentalist, the special is certainly thorough. The three parts feature 21 experts from the fields of archeology, theology, astrology and even criminology” (Warner, 2001, p. D1) For example, within the documentary, historians question whether Jesus was born in a stable (since people in Palestine kept their animals in caves not stables), whether Mary and Joseph were alone when Jesus was born (childbirth was a very dangerous experience and Mary and Joseph probably had relatives in Bethlehem who would have helped) and whether Jesus worked with Judas to arrange his turn-over to the Romans (an updated translation of the New Testament indicates that this is more accurate). At the same time, scholars who appear in *Jesus: The Complete Story* support the ideas that Jesus existed as a historical figure (an early historian included a reference to Jesus), that Christ’s hands sweated blood in the Garden of Gethsemane (doctors have uncovered a rare medical condition that causes people to sweat blood when under extreme stress) and that a bright star was seen in the sky when Jesus was born (astronomers believe that, at this time, Jupiter was passing through the constellation of Aries making it appear like a very bright star).

High-end technology was also used to bring audiences closer to the historical Jesus. Computer graphics rendered stunning images of what Palestine may have looked like while Jesus was alive by superimposing the ancient possibility over pictures of current ruins.<sup>7</sup> The highlight of technological innovation came in the last ten minutes of the program. Historians, archeologists and computer specialists created a three-dimensional computer image of a first century Jew – a recreation that was promoted by BBC and Discovery as a recreation of what Christ might have looked like. According to promotional materials, to create “an image of Christ far removed from centuries of convention,” the producers relied on a 2000-year-old Jewish skull along with ancient religious documents, computer software and new forensic techniques (Lorenzi, 2001).

Most reviews of the documentary noted that the image of Christ created by the program (Figure 2) was “ a far cry from the pale, thin, long-faced, long-haired man of many depictions” (Zad, 2001, p. Y04).

QuickTime™ and a  
TIFF (Uncompressed) decompressor  
are needed to see this picture.

(Figure 2)

The *Washington Times* observed that the face created by the documentary is “wider, rounder and rougher” than typical depictions, and “the new image portrays Jesus as Middle Eastern with curly dark hair, dark eyes and a broad nose” (Warner, 2001, p. D1). Furthermore, the 1<sup>st</sup> century Jew rendered by the computer looks older than Jesus is typically depicted. According to historians, the hot environment and persistent sunshine generally caused wrinkles and early aging in men by their mid 30s. Furthermore, Christ more likely had short hair and a short beard (the documentary quotes a section from the Bible that states that long hair was considered “disgraceful”). And, scientists said, Jesus’ skin color would certainly be dark. Rather than relying on simple ethnic likelihood, one historian notes that Jesus would have to have had a dark skin tone in order to hide amongst the Egyptians, as the Gospels say he did. Additionally, he relies on Biblical references to Christ’s genealogy (as a descendant of David), which included Afro-Asiatic ancestors who would cause him to have a darker skin tone.

Despite the numerous ways that the documentary altered the idealized Western image of Christ, the program generated little controversy. Perhaps the focus on the Christ of history and the historical fact that Christ was actually from the Middle East allowed people to accept the scientific “truths” presented by the program. Ann Rodgers-Melnick (2001) notes, “Elements that publicists used to hype the film won’t amaze anyone who

attended Sunday School in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Outside of a few fringe groups no one in America thinks Jesus was likely to have had blue eyes or blond hair” (p. 36). Certainly, it seems as though a Middle Eastern Christ seemed preferable to a Black Christ. Before the Black man in New Jersey got death threats for playing Christ in the Passion Play, Hispanics had been cast in the role at the same theatre without any reaction. Similarly, one of the criticisms of the *National Catholic Reporter*’s Black Millennial Christ was that it made no sense, because Jesus was a Jew.

Also significant is the fact that this program aired before September 11, 2001, when representing Christ as Middle Eastern was not tied up with the same meaning, or nationalism and ethnic fear, as it might be today. This Middle Eastern image, particularly with its short beard and natural expression, might be more controversial now. The rendering of a first century Jew, which the documentary held up as a possible model for Christ, looks more like a mug shot than the noble images of Christ with which we are most familiar. Perhaps it is telling that Mel Gibson cast a white, blue-eyed man in his 2004 *The Passion of the Christ*. While speaking Aramaic may be acceptable, perhaps the Western world is no longer prepared to think of Christ (particularly the Christ of faith) as Middle Eastern.

Another reason *Jesus: The Complete Story* may have escaped controversy relates to its mobilization of science and technology. The documentary repeatedly refers to “remarkable discoveries in science and history,” “new evidence” and “breakthroughs in science and archeology.” Scientists are shown working in laboratories, historians are surrounded by books, and archeologists are wandering around ruins. These discourses of science, and the fetishization of technology allowed the program to present its information as “neutral.” Of course, as Michel Foucault has illustrated, this is a false objectivity that hides true motivations of power and control. Since the science is used to both support the Gospels and debunk them, we must ask why a global corporation might be interested in both bolstering and tearing down one of the largest organized religions in the world.

Certainly there are elements of Christianity that strongly support global capitalism and the benefits that it might bring to the world. However, there are also a number of Christian organizations that question the role of global capitalism in breaking down nationalism, in focusing on wealth rather than good deeds and in spreading the ideals of consumerism around the world. A writer in the *National Catholic Reporter* (a periodical that supported *Jesus: The Complete Story's* representation of Christ) explained that there are a number of Catholic organizations that are lobbying for “a reversal of the trends that are concentrating economic power in a few super corporations” (Ruether, 2003, p. 16). The rules of global capitalism, Rosemary Ruether (2003) writes, “are creating unemployment, hunger poverty and devastation of the earth through much of the world. They need to be replaced by a process that breaks up such large corporations and favors locally owned farms and businesses that are responsible to the communities in which they are based” (p. 16).

If there are indeed Christian organizations that are powerfully questioning the benefits of global capitalism (particularly in the markets of Asia, Africa and Latin America where Catholicism is growing and global corporations are spreading), then perhaps there is motivation for global media corporations to attempt to question the faith. At the same time, however, this questioning cannot be overt. Focusing on the science and technology of faith has the potential to move the center of historical understanding toward the mass mediated truth of the “neutral” sciences. While the motivations for these shifts certainly need further examination, the potential of such programs to reshape our ideological assumptions must be acknowledged. Certainly the notion of understanding Christ as both a historical figure and as a non-white is a significant cultural step that could potentially question the dominance of whiteness. We must make sure, however, that we continue to scrutinize the “truth” – and the cultural power – that is taking its place.

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> Funding for the documentary also came from France 3.

<sup>2</sup> See “Is This the Face of Jesus?” (2001) in *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*; “Jesus Doc Features New Image” (2001) in *The Toronto Star*; and “TV Documentary Challenges Convention View of Jesus” (2001) in *The Seattle Times*.

<sup>3</sup> For information about the representation of Christ in film and television see, for example, *American Religious and Biblical Spectaculars* by Gerald E. Forshey (1992), *Movie Christs* by Peter Malone (1990), and *Images of Jesus* by Anton Wessels (1990).

<sup>4</sup> As a co-production, *Jesus of Nazareth* must have been designed for international distribution. *Passion of the Christ*, on the other hand, according to Mel Gibson, was made for religious – not economic – reasons.

<sup>5</sup> [This move was devastating for PBS, which had, until then, been the main outlet for BBC programs in the U.S.](#) Although PBS could still work with the BBC, it could only be on projects that Discovery passed on first.

<sup>6</sup> The documentary aired on the BBC earlier, starting on April 1, 2001 over a period of three nights.

<sup>7</sup> This historical information also added an element of tourism to the program, thus allowing people around the world to “see” the land of Jesus’ birth, both as it was at the time and today.

## Works Cited

Anderson, B. (1998; rev. ed.). *Imagined Communities*. London: Verso.

BBC Unveils Hi-Tech Jesus. (2001, March 27). *BBC News On-line*, Retrieved March 20, 2005 from [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/tv\\_and\\_radio/1243339.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/tv_and_radio/1243339.stm).

Berger, W. (1995, June 25). The Brains Behind Smart TV. *Los Angeles Times*, 16.

Black Jesus in Union City, NJ, 'The Passion Play' Stirs Community Racism. (1997, March 24). *Jet*, 12.

Curtin, M. (1995). *Redeeming the Wasteland: Television Documentary and Cold War Politics*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University.

Documentary Hypothesizes Dark-Skinned Jesus. (2001, April 6). *National Catholic Reporter*, 7.

Documentary Series Challenges Traditional Image of Jesus. (2001, March 27). *The Associated Press*. Retrieved March 15, 2005 from LexisNexis database.

Forshey, G. (1992). *American Religious and Biblical Spectaculars*. Westport, CT: Praeger.

Fursich, E. (2003). Between Credibility and Commodification: Nonfiction Entertainment as a Global Media Genre. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 6, 131-153.

Grace, K. (200, January 2). Black Christ, Black Pope? *The Report*, 53.

Haley, K. (1997, November 3). The Documentary Climbs to New Heights. *Broadcasting and Cable*, 46.

Hobsbawm, E.J. (1990). *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Is This the Face of Jesus? (2001, March 29). *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 1D.

Jenkins, P. (2002, March 29). A New Christendom. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved March 20, 2005 from <http://chronicle.com/free/v48/i29/29b00701.htm>.

Jensen, R. (2003, September 20). Jesus Up Close. *Christian Century*, 26-30.

Jesus Doc Features New Image. (2001, March 28). *The Toronto Star*. Retrieved July 2, 2007 from LexisNexis database.

Lorenzi, R. (2001). Jesus Remade in New Documentary. *Discovery News*. Retrieved March 19, 2004 from [http://doc.discovery.com/news/briefs/20030414/jesus\\_print.html](http://doc.discovery.com/news/briefs/20030414/jesus_print.html).

Malhotra, R. (2004). Dialogue on Whiteness Studies. *Sulekha*. Retrieved March 20, 2005 from <http://www.sulekha.com/column.asp?cid=305959>.

Malone, P. (1990). *Movie Christs and Anti-Christs*. New York: Crossroad,.

Mifflin, L. (1998, March 20). BBC and Discovery to Develop Programming Together. *The New York Times*, 2D.

Mink, E. (2001, April 13). 'Face' Has Greater Values Jesus Bio. *Daily News* (New York), 114.

Pitt, W. (2004, March 2). 'The Passion' of the Americans. *Liberal Slant*. Retrieved March 20, 2005 from <http://www.liberalstlant.com/wrp030204.htm>.

Prothero, S. (2003). *American Jesus: How the Son of God Became a National Icon*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Raab, K. (1997). Chistology Crossing Boundaries: The Threat of Imaging Christ as Other Than a White Male. *Pastoral Psychology*, 45, 389-399.

Rodgers-Melnick, A. (2001, April 13). Messiah Complexity. *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 36.

Ruether, R. (2003, February 7). Global Capitalism a New Challenge to Theologians. *National Catholic Reporter*, 16.

Solomon, H. (1998, June 21). History Lessons. *The Boston Herald*, 6.

Sutcliffe, T. (2001, June 17). Now for a Programme Right Up Your Strata. *The Independent on Sunday* (London), 14.

TV Documentary Challenges Conventional View of Jesus. (2001, March 28). *The Seattle Times*, A4.

Warner, B. (2001, April 14). Discovery Puts Context Into the Life of 'Jesus.' *The Washington Times*, D1.

Webb, A. (2001, March 26). Looking for the Historical Jesus. *BBC On-line*. Retrieved March 20, 2005 from [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/tv\\_and\\_radio/1243954.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/tv_and_radio/1243954.stm).

Wells, M. (2001, March 27). Is This the Real Face of Jesus Christ? *The Guardian*. Retrieved March 19, 2004 from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/print/0,3858,41600069-103690,00.html>.

Wessels, A. (1990). *Images of Jesus: How Jesus is Perceived and Portrayed in Non-European Cultures*. London: SCM Press.

Why Do We Think Christ Was White? (2001, March 27). *BBC News On-line*. Retrieved March 20, 2005 from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/1244037.stm>.

Zad, M. (2001, April 15). The Jesus Story: A Scientific View. *The Washington Post*, Y04.