1. Record Nr. UNINA9910820845903321 Autore Goldenberg David M. <1947-> Titolo The curse of Ham: race and slavery in early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam / / David M. Goldenberg Princeton, N.J.; Woodstock,: Princeton University Press, 2005 Pubbl/distr/stampa **ISBN** 1-282-30375-9 9786612303753 1-4008-2854-6 Edizione [Course Book] Descrizione fisica 1 online resource (468 p.) Jews, Christians, and Muslims from the ancient to the modern Collana Disciplina 200.8996 Soggetti Blacks in the Bible Blacks - Public opinion - History - To 1500 Jews - Attitudes - History - To 1500 Christians - Attitudes - History - To 1500 Muslims - Attitudes - History - To 1500 Slavery - Justification - History Black race - Color Lingua di pubblicazione Inglese **Formato** Materiale a stampa Monografia Livello bibliografico

Note generali Originally published: 2003.

Nota di bibliografia Includes bibliographical references and index.

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How old is prejudice against black people? Were the racist attitudes that fueled the Atlantic slave trade firmly in place 700 years before the European discovery of sub-Saharan Africa? In this groundbreaking book, David Goldenberg seeks to discover how dark-skinned peoples, especially black Africans, were portrayed in the Bible and by those who interpreted the Bible--Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Unprecedented in rigor and breadth, his investigation covers a 1,500-year period, from ancient Israel (around 800 B.C.E.) to the eighth century C.E., after the birth of Islam. By tracing the development of anti-Black sentiment during this time, Goldenberg uncovers views about race, color, and slavery that took shape over the centuries--most centrally, the belief that the biblical Ham and his descendants, the black Africans, had been cursed by God with eternal slavery. Goldenberg begins by examining a host of references to black Africans in biblical and postbiblical Jewish literature. From there he moves the inquiry from Black as an ethnic group to black as color, and early Jewish attitudes toward dark skin color. He goes on to ask when the black African first became identified as slave in the Near East, and, in a powerful culmination, discusses the resounding influence of this identification on Jewish, Christian, and Islamic thinking, noting each tradition's exegetical treatment of pertinent biblical passages. Authoritative, fluidly written, and situated at a richly illuminating nexus of images, attitudes, and history, The Curse of Ham is sure to have a profound and lasting impact on the perennial debate over the roots of racism and slavery, and on the study of early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.