"The People with Burned Faces:"
Greco-Roman Anti-Black Racism and Its Modern Effects

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for graduation with Honors in History and Classics.

Whitman College
2018

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

This work would not have been possible without the efforts and support of many. I would like to thank Professor Sarah Davies for her suggestions, advice, and encouragement. I would also like to thank the members of the History Department for the instruction I have received over the years. Similarly, thanks to the members of the Classics Department for their teaching during my time at Whitman. My friends provided me with support during the researching and writing process, and I thank them as well. Finally, I give thanks to my parents and family, whose love and guidance has been integral to my success.

Abstract

Anti-black racism is not a modern phenomenon. Instead, it existed as long ago as the ancient Greco-Roman world. Greek and Roman writers displayed racist attitudes in many works, and with various levels of explicitness. Authors including Aristotle, Diodorus, Ovid, and Martial demonstrated that their society held a coherent body of racial thought that consistently denigrated, scorned, mocked, and exotified black people. Given the importance the study of the "Classics" was given in the modern era, it is unsurprising to find that modern racists used ancient texts, theories, and practices to support and justify their own racism. While Jeffersonian apologies for slavery are now largely absent from scholarship, the newfound denial of the existence of ancient racism continues the harmful legacy of oppression. With the ancient world now being appropriated by white extremists, it is increasingly important to acknowledge the racist legacy of the ancient Greco-Roman world in order to be able to fight against racism.

Introduction: Race, Antiquity, and Modernity

The modern scholarly consideration of black people in the ancient Greco-Roman world is often centered around the question of whether such people experienced anti-black racism. Because of the history and legacy of the "Classics," resulting discussions about race, which are difficult in many contexts, become even more fraught. The consensus has generally been that there was no such thing as anti-black racism in the ancient Greco-Roman world. However, with careful consideration of the evidence, along with thoughtful attention that modern preconceptions play as little part as possible in this inquiry, it is possible to conclude that ancient racial attitudes were not only disturbingly similar to modern racist ones but also influenced and were used to justify racist attitudes and policies over the course of the last several hundred years. In the ancient Greco-Roman world, black people were depicted in various media, including poetry, prose, and visual art. This study will be largely confined to the literary sources because it is usually impossible to extrapolate racial attitudes from visual art that has often been separated irreversibly from its ancient context. Examination of the literary sources ultimately leads to the conclusion that ancient Greco-Roman culture contained anti-black racism.[1] Furthermore, this racism resonates with modern racist stereotypes, and has contributed to the long history of "Classics" being used in the formation and construction of "Western Civilization."

Before continuing, it is necessary to qualify and explain the definitions of certain terms in both ancient and modern usage. This is especially important given the

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[1] The evidence cited in this work does not represent the full extent of all ancient Greco-Roman references to black people, but instead is a representative and conclusive selection.

inherently unclear meanings of some terms, along with certain shifts in meaning between ancient and modern usages. The first term to define is "race" itself. In this work, race means the genetic ancestry of a person that is expressed in certain physical characteristics such as skin color. It is also important to remember, however obvious it may be, that only certain physical traits were selected, and those because they differed between certain groups of people. Accordingly, racial divisions highlight the differences between categories as they were designed, which itself results in the solidification of Otherness. For example, skin and hair were identified to be obvious differences between "black" and "white" people, and so special attention was paid to these characteristics while physical similarities were ignored. Similarly, especially in more recent times, the various hair colors of "white" people did not indicate different racial groups, because that trait was not artificially selected as a differentiator. Thus, defining some physical characteristics as "racial" plays into racist notions, yet is inescapable because it is encoded in contemporary language and informs subsequent thinking.

Given this definition of "race," racism is therefore the discrimination against someone or some group because they are a particular race. The most important thing to note here is that the discrimination involved in racism does not have to be monumental. It could involve positions of stated superiority by the group in power, mocking or derision of the target group's perceived behaviors or features, and reluctance to associate with the target group based on their perceived negative influence. For anyone living after the beginning of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, particularly those in the United States, racism almost inevitably conjures up images of the Ku Klux Klan, Jim

Crow, and especially slavery. But, in the ancient Greco-Roman world, there was no group analogous to the Klan, no law codes attest legal segregation, and slavery was not limited to "black" people. However, the absence of the most egregious forms of racist violence does not mean that the kinds of racism that did exist were excusable. In most cases, it is impossible to know just what effect ancient anti-black racism had on the black people of the time, given the general scarcity of ancient sources and the specific lack of sources written by black people themselves.[2] Nevertheless, judging by the effects of analogous forms of modern racism, the consequences of ancient anti-black racism would have been meaningfully negative.

The next terms to define are "black" and "white" in regard to races. The meanings of these words are perhaps now more complicated than ever before due to the legacy of slavery and discrimination in America and around the world. For the purposes of this work, "black" people are those who have traceable ancestry in peoples native to Africa whose characteristics include dark skin and curly hair. These are the two characteristics most often associated by ancient authors with the group called "Ethiopians," a word that literally means "burnt-faced people."[3] Importantly, this term did not correspond exactly with people from modern-day Ethiopia, but instead was a general category for anyone whose features designated them as black. On the other hand, "white" is here used to mean people with recent ancestry only native to Europe, including people from Italy, Greece, and surrounding areas not in Asia Minor or

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[2] Terence, the Roman playwright, is sometimes theorized to have been black based on his cognomen *Afer* and a reference to him as *fuscus*. See Frank M. Snowden, Jr., "The Negro in Classical Italy" pages 271-272, and note 17. Regardless of his race, Terence's works hardly ever addressed race and so do not represent a black view of black issues.

[3] Frank M. Snowden, Jr., *Before Color Prejudice: The Ancient View of Blacks* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 5-6.

Africa. This attribution runs the risk of being anachronistic because ancient Greeks and Romans did not refer to themselves with terms meaning "white." Instead, they reserved these words for "barbarians" from northern Europe, and associated their skin color with negative attributes.[4] Despite this, calling European Greeks and Romans "white" is warranted because it contrasts them and their domination of the culture with black people, while also foreshadowing the eventual reception and adoption of the "Classics" as the hallmark of white civilization.

These definitions of race and of white and black are contextualized differently in the ancient world from the modern, and have complicated relationships to the notions of "Greek-ness" and "Roman-ness." In the ancient world, both were more exactly ethnic categories rather than racial ones. Certain commonalities made someone "Greek," and Roman citizenship made someone "Roman." As articulated in Herodotus, the Greeks were united by "blood and speech, and the shrines of [shared] gods and [common] sacrifices… and the likeness of [their] way of life…."[5] This formulation did reference blood relationship, but its other elements – speech, religion, and living patterns – could easily transcend the racial. Similarly, Roman citizenship was not restricted by racial identity, and came to encompass members from Europe, Asia, and Africa. However, despite the reality of some level of racial diversity, Greek and Roman societies must be understood as holding certain general cultural values and attitudes, and one of those was anti-black racism. Therefore, while Greek and Roman people could be of any race, this did not preclude the society made up of that diverse constituency from being racist.

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[4] See page 34.
[5] Herodotus, *The Persian Wars* VIII.14, trans. A. D. Godley.

There is another modern layer on top of the ancient context. When conjuring up an image of a "Greek" or a "Roman," one would generally think of a hoplite or philosopher, or a laborer or emperor as portrayed in modern media. In these imaginings, the people would most typically be white. These images of the ancient world are pervasive and restrict our imaging to an almost entirely white world. Additionally, the legacy of black slavery affects perception here as well, because while both ancient Greece and Rome were slave societies, those slaves came from all over the known world and the institution was not connected explicitly to race as it was in the Americas.[6] But, as mentioned above, this whitewashed image of the ancient classical world does not represent the reality of the situation. Nevertheless, the whitened image of Greece and Rome has persisted, and has even been used to further modern white supremacy.[7]

The historical realities of Greece and Rome complicate the narrative of the past. "Greek" or "Roman" do not mean "white," and so referring to Greeks or Romans on one side and black Africans on the other presents a false dichotomy. However, it is still possible to say that Greek or Roman society displayed an aversion to black people because the prevailing attitudes of a society do not necessarily align with the interests of the members of that society. Therefore, a society with even a large proportion of black members could still maintain anti-black sentiment. While the black population of ancient Greece or Rome was probably not large, these civilizations encountered and described black people on many occasions and demonstrated racist views.

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[6] Though slaves were generally "barbarians," no specific race of "barbarians" constituted the entire slave population.
[7] See pages 74-75.

Another pair of terms should be defined before continuing: the words "ancient" and "modern." The term "modern" has connotations of achievements and forward progress, an evolution past the old and outdated. According to Neville Morley, "[f]rom the end of the eighteenth century, commentators on human affairs became increasingly convinced that they and their society were experiencing an entirely new form of existence… but increasingly "modern" came to imply a qualitative as well as temporal distinction."[8] These connotations are counterproductive to this work, because the supposedly more advanced modern people appealed to ancient precedents for legitimacy.[9] Thus, in this work, the term "modern" refers to people, works, and societies from after the beginning of the conception of "modernity" as understood by Morley, so from about 1750 onwards. And since it would be a stretch to call something as late as 1749 "ancient," that term should be read as denoting direct continuity of culture from Greco-Roman societies of Before the Common Era. The most recent date to qualify as "ancient" under this method could be endlessly debated, but the latest source referred to as "ancient" here is from the seventh century CE. In the case of that particular work, its composition in Latin and its direct references to more ancient texts firmly connect it to the safely ancient past.[10]

The final thing to note is the artificiality of the division between Greek and Roman sources, and the seemingly contradictory use of the phrase "Greco-Roman." The reason for the use of the phrase "ancient Greco-Roman world" is that the culture and attitudes of the Greek world and the Roman one are bound together, especially when it comes to

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[8] Neville Morley, *Antiquity and Modernity* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), ix.
[9] See Chapter Four.
[10] See page 49.

racism. Accordingly, the division of Greek sources from Roman sources is really an artificial division between Greek language sources and Latin ones. Anti-black racist attitudes remained essentially consistent across both.

Chapter One: Historiographic Legacy

The English-language historiography on race in Greco-Roman antiquity is somewhat limited, and the works that deal with black Africans are a fraction of that already small pool. The majority of those have some part dedicated to the author's conclusion about anti-black racism in the ancient Greco-Roman world. In the majority of these cases, the conclusion that was drawn was that there was no "true" racism against black people at that time. This conclusion is erroneous, and although there were those who contested it, the dominant narrative continues to deny the presence of anti-black racism in the Greco-Roman world, and even argues that discussing race in an ancient context at all is dangerously anachronistic. This historiographic view is actually an element in the continuing legacy of racism in the subject.[11]

The historiography on this field can be divided into three schools, differentiated by a combination of sources consulted and exact shade of conclusion reached. In chronological order, they can be labeled the "Visual Survey" school, the "Colorblind" school, and the "Adjustment" school. The first school began in the early twentieth century and, predictably, it manifested the prejudices of that era. Grace Hadley Beardsley's book, *The Ethiopian in Greek and Roman Civilization: A Study of the Negro Type*, was the main work in this school, and later authors in the field engaged with it even forty years after its original publication. Beardsley's work was a survey of the visual evidence combined with racial assumptions from the time of the author – hence the title "Visual Survey." Ancient black Africans were understood through then

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[11] See page 74.

contemporary racial realities, and as a result Beardsley advanced positions with little evidence other than relatively recent historical precedent. She concentrated on visual art and the representations of black people through the media of sculpture, painting, and similar forms rather than dealing extensively with literary evidence. Importantly, Beardsley did not set out to investigate whether there was racism in the ancient world, but instead unconsciously projected her own racism onto her analysis of the past. Occasionally, there were hints of the sort of analysis that would come later, which sought to evaluate the social position of black people in the ancient world, but this type of approach was so scarce that it cannot be considered a main component of this early-twentieth-century school. Nevertheless, this aspect is noteworthy especially because Beardsley suggested that there could have been anti-black racism in the ancient Greco-Roman world.[12] This suggestion, however minimal, would fall out of favor in the works of subsequent scholars.

The next historiographic school was largely the work of Frank M. Snowden, Jr., who simultaneously sought to prove the presence of black people in classical antiquity and the absence of any kind of racism towards them. The argument that ancient people were, in a sense, colorblind leads to the name the "Colorblind" school. This school heavily utilized textual evidence and extensively recorded a vast number of references to black people in Greek and Latin. Despite this canvassing and subsequent analysis, Snowden concluded that there was no "color prejudice" in the ancient Greco-Roman world. It is unclear how or why Snowden reached this conclusion, but theories about

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[12] Grace Hadley Beardsley, *The Negro in Greek and Roman Civilization: A Study of the Ethiopian Type* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1929), 119.

his method will be investigated below.[13] Although his ultimate conclusion must be rejected, his linguistic analysis and collection of ancient sources is valuable and relied on throughout this work.

Snowden's conclusion, that there was no racism in the ancient world, has continued to be the mode of thought to the present. There have been works published in response to the Colorblind school, and these have mostly been supportive of its conclusions, even if some points have been contested. These responses make up the next school in the historiography. This school is characterized by the general acceptance of Snowden with only relatively minor adjustments, hence the title the "Adjustment" school. The main scholars of this school include Lloyd A. Thompson, David Goldenberg, and Erich S. Gruen. Their work represents the current state of the field, having stayed largely the same in its conclusions about racism in the ancient world since the publication of Snowden's earliest relevant work, "The Negro in Classical Italy," in 1947. The only substantive change has been the general disappearance of the explicit racial prejudices found in the scholarship of the early twentieth century, and their replacement with implicit racial prejudices further explored below.

The Visual Survey school's principle work was Beardsley's *The Negro in Greek and Roman Civilization: A Study of the Ethiopian Type*. This book was first published in 1929, and it was a good representation of the state of racial scholarship at the time. The book focused on the examination of artifacts that the author claimed depicted "negroes," along with some consideration of textual references to black

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[13] See pages 74-75.

people. The book is not an investigation into whether or not black people were discriminated against, but, as part of the Visual Survey school, it provides a series of examples with only superficial, and often racist, interpretations to accompany them. Despite this, Beardsley's section on Roman literary references to black people suggested that Africans were viewed as inferior to some degree, although Beardsley did not focus on or develop this assessment.

The key features of this school in the historiography are displayed throughout the book. Those features included a combination of textual and physical sources and, most importantly, numerous ancient examples analyzed with outdated racial theories and problematic characterizations of black people. These characterizations did not appear in faithful reconstructions of ancient racial attitudes, but rather in the form of biased assertions based on implicit and explicit assumptions and irresponsible conclusions made evident in the text. While the presence of numerous examples and the synthesis of literary and physical sources were self-evident in the book, examples of the most prominent feature, the inclusion of problematic elements, must be highlighted and their effects examined in order to fully appreciate the ramifications of this school of scholarship.

Beardsley's analysis of literary references to Ethiopians clearly revealed the inherent biases in operation. First, Beardsley asserted, in reading selected Greek sources, that there existed on the one hand "vague and unreal Ethiopians [in] poetry," and on the other hand, "real" Ethiopians in later prose accounts.[14] Beardsley began with a survey of the poetic Ethiopians. She wrote that "[t]he absence of exact

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[14] Ibid., 2.

geographical knowledge of Africa and eastern Asia is the basic reason for the profound

confusion in the Greek mind about the Ethiopians… The confusion begins with Homer

himself, to whom Ethiopia was a land at the remotest border of the world beside the

stream of Ocean."[15] For Beardsley, this sentiment was evident in Homer's *Odyssey*:

> ἀλλ᾿ ὁ μὲν Αἰθίοπας μετεκίαθε τηλόθ᾿ ἐόντας,
> Αἰθίοπας τοὶ διχθὰ δεδαίαται, ἔσχατοι ἀνδρῶν,
> οἱ μὲν δυσομένου Ὑπερίονος οἱ δ᾿ ἀνιόντος…
>
> But now Poseidon had gone among the far-off Ethiopians the Ethiopians who
> dwell divided in two, the farthermost of men, some where Hyperion sets and
> some where he rises…[16]

After establishing that even the most ancient extant Greek literary source mentioned

Ethiopians, Beardsley made a bold claim. She wrote "[t]he Ethiopians of Homer…

comrades of the gods rather than of men, [were] creatures too shadowy for any

description of their personal appearance. There [was] no indication that they were

black…."[17] Beardsley disregarded the etymology of the word "Ethiopian" and claimed

that that derivation was not "allu[ded] to" by early poetic authors.[18] Beardsley offered

no alternative explanation for the word. This discomfort with the presence of blackness

and subsequent move to essentially whitewash Ethiopians in Homeric epic seemed to

be a product of the desire to keep the Classical canon "clean" and maintain Greek, and

thus white, domination by denying black presence. Indeed, Beardsley went as far as to

say in passing that "we cannot argue that Homer had never heard of dark men because

he does not specifically mention them…."[19] With this, Beardsley suggested that Homer

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[15] Ibid., 1.
[16] Homer, *Odyssey*, I. 22-24, trans. A. T. Murray and revised by George E. Dimock, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 1919.
[17] Beardsley, *The Negro in Greek and Roman Civilization*, 2.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid.

might have heard of black people, but that there were no such people in his works. This conclusion is then consistent with her insistence that the Ethiopians cannot be considered black. However, this assertion is untrue, since Eurybates, Odysseus' companion, was described as a black man.[20] The significance here is that Beardsley twice denied the presence of black people in the epic works, without or against evidence. This type of assertion was brought to its fullest conclusion when Beardsley wrote that Memnon, the son of Eos who later became associated with Ethiopia, "*because of his great beauty* was evidently white…" [emphasis added].[21] To suggest that someone's famous beauty was proof of their whiteness constituted a huge assumption and manifested Beardsley's racial bias. To Beardsley, Memnon must be white, either because she could not conceive of someone being renowned for beauty who is not white, or because she believed that ancient people could not have conceived the same. However, Beardsley gave no evidence or further explanation of her passing comment. In the same section, Beardsley continued:

> [t]he ruling caste of Ethiopia must have been considered white. But what was the color of the people ruled over? Greek writers seem to have avoided this problem by silence… But the vase painter wanting to portray Memnon or Andromeda [who was also associated with Ethiopia] was confronted with the necessity of selecting a physiognomy for their followers or servants. Hence on certain vases treated in another chapter negro types appear.[22]

Beardsley asserted and assumed numerous things here. First, she asserted that the rulers of Ethiopia were "considered white" by the Greeks.[23] In doing so, she again denied the possibility of black participation in the epic. She then suggested, through the

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[20] Homer, *Odyssey*, XIX. 246-247.
[21] Beardsley, *The Negro in Greek and Roman Civilization*, 8.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid.

rhetorical question and the pottery example, that Greeks conceived of white people

ruling over black ones in Ethiopia. She did not bother to consider another explanation

for the colors of the figures on the pottery. In constructing this narrative of white rule

over black, Beardsley ultimately displayed her own prejudices about the "rightful

place" of black people and reflected the clear racial hierarchy present at the time of her

writing.

Later in Beardsley's book, in the section on Roman literary sources, the

discussion continued the same trend of biased interpretation, albeit with new assertions.

As much as the Greek section involved distancing black people from the epic works,

the Roman section involved presuppositions of slavery. Early in the chapter, Beardsley

wrote "[t]he Romans… built up important colonies in Africa… There can be no doubt

that African tribes furnished the Romans with vast numbers of slaves and that in the

Empire the dark races were a vastly more common sight at Rome than at Athens."[24] In

this selection, Beardsley asserted that black people were more common in the Roman

Empire than in Greece and, importantly, that they came to be that way through slavery.

Beardsley offered no evidence other than her own reasoning based on biased logic. At

first, that logic appears to be sound – i.e., that the Romans did expand into Africa, and

that they did take war captives as slaves – but the unsourced nature of the claim

recalled her earlier assertions about Ethiopians in Homeric myth, relegating black

people to positions that align with modern conceptions of them. Just as there had to be

a white ruling class in Ethiopia, black people must have been incorporated into society

through slavery. This claim was one of a few Beardsley makes that would be hugely

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[24] Ibid., 116.

important to the study of black people in ancient world – namely, that if the majority were indeed slaves, then there would have been significant effects upon the perception of black people as a whole. However, since this claim is not supported with evidence, it can only suggest an interpretation that all too conveniently fit into modern historical precedent.

In her assessment of Roman literary sources, Beardsley included a thought on the social position of black people in the ancient world. She suggested that Romans viewed black people somewhat negatively. As she wrote, "[t]he Roman attitude toward the Ethiopian as expressed in scattered passages [was] far less kindly than the Greek… in the absence of any expressed good will and in the face of references which have a superior or contemptuous tone it is evident that the Romans had no special affection for Ethiopians at Rome…."[25] Here, Beardsley has posited first that the Greeks had a somewhat positive view of black people and second that the Romans held a negative one. Though Beardsley's comment about the position of black people in the Greek world will later be contested, her analysis for the Roman world is largely valid, but did not go far enough. Beardsley based this conclusion on two cited sources.[26] She claimed the first to be from Cicero:

Cum hoc homine an cum stipite Aethiope…[27]

Beardsley noted that this reading of the text is contentious, and wrote "[i]n notes it [i.e., "Aethiope"] [was] translated as 'blockhead' and the statement made that in antiquity

[25] Ibid., 119.
[26] The text she attributes to her first source, Cicero, does not appear in any discoverable edition of the text. See pages 71-72.
[27] Cicero, *On Old Age* 6, cited in Beardsley 119.

the Ethiopians were synonymous with stupidity… this passage alone [was] basis for such a theory."[28] Her second example was from Juvenal:

> *…aut nigri manus ossea Mauri*
> *Et cui per mediam nolis occurrere noctem*

> …or the bony hand of a dark Moroccan, a character you'd not want to run into in the middle of the night….[29]

For Beardsley, this proved that black people were an unlucky sign for the Romans. Together with the Cicero example, this led Beardsley to her conclusion that Romans viewed black people negatively. As a whole, Beardsley exemplified the Visual Survey school of the historiography. Her work canvassed a large amount of examples, both literary and artistic, and she made unsourced and biased assertions, while infusing the study with problematic racial elements of her time. She did add the suggestion that Romans were prejudiced against black people, but this conclusion was far from a main focus, and there was no further pursuit of its implications.

The Colorblind school followed, and with it the assertion that there was no "color prejudice" in the ancient Greco-Roman world. This school is largely the construction of Snowden and was most comprehensively articulated in his 1970 work, *Blacks in Antiquity: Ethiopians in the Greco-Roman Experience*. There were three main components of the Colorblind school. The first was the primary use of literary sources, with only secondary consideration given to physical evidence. The second was that, like Beardsley, Snowden was influenced by his time, and contemporary biases colored his analyses. Third, and most importantly, the main component of his school

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[28] Beardsley, *The Negro in Greek and Roman Civilization*, 119.
[29] Juvenal, *Satires*, 5.53-54, trans. Susanna Morton Braund, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 2004. The translation "Moroccan" obscures the link of the Latin *Maurus* with black people. See page 47 note 101.

was the conclusion that there was no anti-black racism in the ancient Greco-Roman world.

The first facet of the Colorblind school – namely, its emphasis on literary sources – was immediately evident in the amount of time and space that Snowden spent on textual sources as opposed to material evidence. Snowden mostly confined discussions of the latter to the footnotes, except in his book, *Blacks in Antiquity*, in which he devoted pages to photographs of statues and other archaeological material. Despite this inclusion in the book, the majority of content remained focused on textual evidence. Snowden himself wrote, "[t]he purpose of the present study has been to collect and to interpret the scattered references to the Negro in Latin authors, and, wherever possible, to supplement this material with archaeological evidence and interpretation in the light of modern anthropological and sociological research."[30] In Snowden's own words, then, archaeological evidence was largely a supplement to textual evidence rather than a focus itself. Snowden's approach therefore contrasted with Beardsley's, who mostly examined physical evidence with some attention paid to the textual. Snowden's focus on the literary constituted a new direction for the study of race in antiquity.

The second element of the Colorblind school was that Snowden, like Beardsley, incorporated biases into his work. For Snowden, these took the form of now-outdated theories and racial "science." In "The Negro in Classical Italy," Snowden wrote, "[a]ccording to modern scientific standards, certain Roman writers would be rated as

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[30] Snowden, "The Negro in Classical Italy," *The American Journal of Philology* vol. 68, no. 3 (1947): 266, accessed April 20, 2018, http://www.jstor.org/stable/291122. He went on to consider Greek sources.

competent anthropologists in respect to their observations on the Negro…."[31] Snowden

then went on to cite three Latin passages, one being from Virgil:

> *… erat unica custos*
> *Afra genus, tota patriam testante figura,*
> *Torta comam labroque tumens et fusca colore,*
> *Pectore lata, iacens mammis, compressior alvo,*
> *Cruribus exilis, spatiosa prodiga planta.*
>
> She was his only help, African by race, her whole appearance
> proclaiming her native land: her hair curly, her lips swollen, and her
> complexion dark; she was wide-chested, with breasts hanging low, her
> belly somewhat pinched, her legs thin, her feet broad and ample.[32]

Snowden wrote, about this and the other passages, that

> [a]ll three passages have in common the fact that they call attention to
> the color of the skin and to the form of the hair. It is fortunate for our
> purposes of identification that the writers have mentioned these
> characteristics, which are two of the most important used by modern
> anthropologists in their classifications of the Negro.[33]

Here, Snowden made it clear that he was using "modern science" to classify black

people. He next made the following observation regarding the *Moretum* passage:

"Narrow heads and wide noses, thick lips and thin legs, protruding jaws and receding

chins, integument rich in pigment but poor in hairy growth, flat feet and round

foreheads, tiny curls and big smiles – these are outstanding features of the ancient and

specialized Negro division of mankind."[34] Snowden was thus using what is now known

to be racist pseudoscience in his classification of what constituted a "Negro," and his

use of contemporary racial "science" to support his argument undermined the

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[31] Ibid.
[32] Virgil, *Moretum*, 31-35, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough and G. P. Goold in *Aeneid: Books 7-12. Appendix Vergiliana* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 1918.
[33] Snowden, "The Negro in Classical Italy," 267.
[34] E. A. Hooton, *Up from the Ape*, (New York: Macmillan Company), 1931, 540-541 cited in Snowden, "The Negro in Classical Italy," 266-267, footnote 2.

conclusions of his work. Though in this instance racial "science" was not used to justify the oppression or prove the inferiority of black people, its inclusion was a regrettable reality of the Colorblind school. The conclusions drawn from the *Moretum* passage were not confined to this passage either: Snowden used it again as an example in *Blacks in Antiquity: Ethiopians in the Greco-Roman Experience*, over twelve years after this first usage.[35] Thus, like Beardsley, Snowden was confined by his time. Just as Beardsley incorporated contemporary biases in her work, Snowden operated within the racist "scientific" structure of his time. This, then, is another connection between the first two stages of the historiography. However, unlike the fact that Snowden's turn toward literary sources subverted the archaeologically dominated methodology of Beardsley, Beardsley and Snowden echoed each other in their injection of racism into their analyses.

The third and most important aspect of the Colorblind school was that, unlike the Visual Survey school, it attempted to conclude whether or not there was anti-black racism in the classical world. In doing so, it did draw on previous authors to support its claim, but also devoted the bulk of its efforts to building its own version of that assertion. The conclusion was that there was no racism in Greco-Roman antiquity. Snowden prefaced his own assertion of this claim with references to other scholars.[36] Some of these scholars had asserted that the world was only divided into white people and "colored people" at the end of the fifteenth century, and before then was divided

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[35] Snowden, *Blacks in Antiquity: Ethiopians in the Greco-Roman Experience*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 1970, 9-10.
[36] Snowden, "Some Greek and Roman Observations on the Ethiopian," *Traditio* vol. 16 (1960): 19-20, accessed April 20, 2018, http://www.jstor.org/stable/27830403.

primarily by religion.[37] Snowden used this argument to substantiate his subsequent claims.

Snowden's denial of ancient racism was primarily seen in his analysis of the literary sources. One example comes from Ovid's *Art of Love* and reads:

> *Parcite praecipue vitia exprobrare puellis,*
> *Utile quae multis dissimulasse fuit…*
> *Nominibus mollire licet mala: fusca vocetur,*
> *Nigrior Illyrica cui pice sanguis erit…*

Particularly forebear to reproach a woman with her faults, faults which many have found it useful to feign otherwise…. With names you can soften shortcomings; let her be called swarthy, whose blood is blacker than Illyrian pitch….[38]

Snowden offered no comment on these lines, appearing to find nothing noteworthy about them in his section on the lexical range of *fuscus*.[39] But these lines were in fact telling. Ovid specifically identified blackness as a "fault" and said that it should not be mentioned at risk of upsetting someone. Given that he was writing for an audience, this remark implied that dark skin was seen as a flaw in his society.[40] Snowden missed or ignored this interpretation of the text. Another example Snowden used to support his claim was this poem by Asclepiades:

> Τὠφθαλμῷ Διδύμη με συνήρπασεν· ὤμοι, ἐγὼ δὲ
> τήκομαι ὡς κηρὸς πὰρ πυρὶ κάλλος ὁρῶν.
> εἰ δὲ μέλαινα, τί τοῦτο; καὶ ἄνθρακες· ἀλλ᾽ ὅτε κείνους
> θάλψωμεν, λάμπουσ᾽ ὡς ῥόδεαι κάλυκες.

> Didyme captured me with her eye. Oh! I melt like wax by a fire when I see her beauty. If she is black – so what? Coals are too, but when we heat them, they glow like rosebuds.[41]

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37 Ibid., 20.
[37] Ibid., 20.
[38] Ovid, *The Art of Love*, 641-642, 657-658, trans. J. H. Mozley and G. P. Goold, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press,) 1929.
[39] Snowden, "The Negro in Classical Italy," 277.
[40] See pages 44-46.
[41] Asclepiades, *On Didyme*, trans. W. R. Paton and Michael A. Tueller in *The Greek Anthology: Books 1-5*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 2014.

Snowden included this poem in a series of references prefaced by "[a]s to the color of the skin and the Greco-Roman concept of beauty, attitudes apparently varied with individuals."[42] While Snowden was correct that different individuals have different preferences, the Didyme poem suggested, in the line "[i]f she is black – so what," that the author was going against a societal norm in his attraction to her.[43] Thus, regardless of the personal feelings of the author, his ancient Greco-Roman society still had racial beauty standards. Snowden overlooked this point and only saw this poem as proof of white acceptance of black people. His analysis, or lack thereof, was therefore insufficient here as well. The examples from Ovid and Asclepiades show how Snowden misconstrued the evidence and reached the conclusion that there was no racism in the Greco-Roman world.

The third school of the historiography is the Adjustment school, which began after the establishment of the Colorblind phase and has continued to the present day. The Adjustment school was characterized by its acceptance of Snowden's conclusion that there was no racism in the ancient world, while, at the same time, critiquing the very exercise of "racial" investigation. Three examples from this school help display three slightly different modifications being made to the Colorblind school. The first example was Lloyd A. Thompson's *Romans and Blacks*. Published in 1989, this book characterized itself as a refutation of Snowden's work, although its essential conclusion was the same. Although the study was confined to Roman society, its conclusions were twofold. The first was that Snowden and others were wrong to approach their studies conceiving of "race" as they did, for the idea of race was too anachronistic, too rooted in

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[42] Snowden, *Blacks in Antiquity*, 178.
[43] Asclepiades, *On Didyme*.

modern conceptions and divorced from ancient reality to be meaningful. The second was

that Roman attitudes toward black people had everything to do with class rather than

race.

Thompson thus asserted that "race" was a problematic approach in the previous

scholarship on the ancient world. He wrote:

> [Existing literature] seeks to explain Roman attitudes towards blacks… in
> terms of 'race', but without presenting any justification for such an
> approach; the authors make free use of terms like 'racial prejudice' and
> 'racism'… This terminology, by definition, presupposes a systematic
> exploitation of one social segment by another group in the same society,
> in an ideological system that ascribes membership of the oppressed
> underclass to all descendants of members of that group…[44]

This linked with Thompson's later assertion that "there was no assumption inherent in

the structures of the society that neither the black newcomer nor his descendants could

'ever become full members of the society because of the presence of the visible factor of

color' or shape."[45] Thompson thus maintained the concept of "race" does not apply to

Roman attitudes, as the preconditions for speaking about it were not present.

Thompson's second assertion was that whatever negative treatment of black

people existed, it was largely based on class rather than race. As he noted:

> [t]he treatment received by an *Aethiops* at the hand of a non-black person
> depended above all on the personal status and deference-position of
> each of the parties in the encounter, and there was considerable variety
> in the statuses and (positive and negative) deference-positions of blacks,
> even if few blacks or none at all were to be found in social stations
> above the rank of plebian.[46]

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[44] Lloyd A. Thompson, *Romans and Blacks*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press), 1989, 2.
[45] Ibid., 158, quoting E.J.B. Rose, *Colour and Citizenship: A Report on British Race Relations*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 1969, 14.
[46] Thompson, *Romans and Blacks*, 158.

This was Thompson's way of explaining the "disapproval" present in, for example, some of Martial's poems.[47] Thompson added, "[b]ut since the majority of blacks in Roman society were humble folk, the question of Roman attitudes relate[d] mostly to humble blacks."[48] Presumably, then, to whatever extent prejudicial attitudes toward black people surfaced in the extant sources, these were to be expected not because of societal racism but because of the high chance that Roman was dealing with a black person of a lower class. In this way, Thompson concluded, like Snowden, that there was no true racism in the ancient Greco-Roman world, even though Thompson did admit that black people were sometimes treated with prejudice.

Another example from the Adjustment school was David Goldenberg's chapter "Racism, Color Symbolism, and Color Prejudice" in *The Origins of Racism in the West*. Goldenberg's main claim was that, at least in the ancient world, what was termed as "racism" against black people was fundamentally different from racism or xenophobia against other marginalized groups. Goldenberg based this assertion on examination of Juvenal's *Satires*, reasoning that "a satirist would not expect his work to be accepted were he not echoing general attitudes among his readers."[49] He concluded that "Greeks, Orientals, Egyptians – they [were] all hated for their foreign ways and their potential to corrupt Roman culture. Blacks, on the other hand, [were] hated not for what they do, but for what they [were]; 'it [was] their physical being that Juvenal despise[d].'"[50] Hatred based on appearance, or as Goldenberg termed it

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[47] Ibid., 26, 27. Martial's poetry will be considered in greater detail in Chapter Three.
[48] Ibid., 159.
[49] David Goldenberg, "Racism, Color Symbolism, and Color Prejudice," in *The Origins of Racism in the West*, eds. Miriam Eliav-Feldon, Benjamin Isaac, and Joseph Ziegler, 88.
[50] Ibid., 88, quoting David Wiesen, "Juvenal and the Blacks," *Classica et Mediaevalia* vol. 31 fasc. 1-2, 1970: 149.

"somatic dissonance," seems to be a clear sign of racism. But Goldenberg disagreed. He asserted that since, in his view, black people were hated for how they looked, whereas other groups were hated for how they acted, these views constituted separate forms of discrimination, especially since "that crucial link between physical and nonphysical characteristics [was] absent."[51] He thus agreed with Thompson, that "racism require[d] a link between the physical and the nonphysical, which then rank[ed] the nonphysical in a hierarchy of social status. The Greco-Roman reaction to the Black, however, [did] not carry any such repository of messages about the innate character and behavior of the black African."[52] Thus, for Goldenberg, there was no racism in the classical world.

The third and final example of the Adjustment school was *Rethinking the Other in Antiquity* by Erich S. Gruen. He acknowledged the potential to identify racism in the reading of some sources, such as in the human sacrifice in the *Aethiopica* or accusations of cowardliness in the *Physiognomics*, but he concluded that these sentiments are outweighed by "positive" aspects that appeared in these and other texts. Like Goldenberg, Gruen echoed the thoughts of Thompson in his assessment that "race" and its related "racism" did not apply to the ancient world. In Gruen's formulation, "'race' may be an altogether misleading and erroneous category. There is little to suggest that the ancients ascribed moral, intellectual, or cultural deficiencies to persons on the basis of their color. Nor did they assume that such physical characteristics were inherited traits, fixed across the generations."[53] Gruen thus gave

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[51] Goldenberg, "Racism, Color Symbolism, and Color Prejudice," 105.
[52] Ibid., 106.
[53] Erich S. Gruen, *Rethinking the Other in Antiquity*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 2012, 197-198.

special mention to satirists like Juvenal, saying that "[t]he distinct color of the Ethiopians lent itself toward jokes, parody, and dark humor [as found in Juvenal's writings] – a matter quite different from ethnic bigotry or abhorrence of the nation."[54] Gruen, then, fits into the Adjustment school in that he questioned the use of "race," denied that "parody" is bigoted, and so concluded that there was no anti-black racism in the ancient Greco-Roman world.

The historiography of anti-black racism in classical antiquity has prominently determined and reaffirmed that there was no true racism in the Greco-Roman world. Despite the fact that early on, in the Visual Survey school, Beardsley noted that Roman attitudes toward "the Negro" seemed less than positive, most scholars who followed reinterpreted that characterization and twisted the evidence to conclude that black people were not the targets of racism. It is at this juncture where the current paper is situated. In contrast to the majority of those who have come before, this work argues that there was indeed anti-black racism in Greco-Roman antiquity, and furthermore, that this bigotry is connected to modern discrimination against black people.

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[54] Ibid., 209.

Chapter Two: Greek Literary Sources

As mentioned above, anti-black racism can be considered a facet of the overarching ancient Greco-Roman world. The racial attitude toward black people seems to have been similar in both societies. This conclusion can be drawn from comparing the Greek evidence to the Roman evidence. Another aspect to keep in mind is that the previously-mentioned modern scholars reached their conclusions by analyzing some of the same evidence that will be examined here, but with the opposite conclusion. Therefore, this work does not deal with the introduction of new evidence but instead the reinterpretation of the existing material. Additionally, the severity of anti-black racism in the ancient Greco-Roman world was milder than many or most of that racism's well-known modern manifestations. The general knowledge of the extreme brutality present in the Transatlantic Slave Trade, the injustice of Jim Crow, and the existence of white terrorist groups like the Ku Klux Klan may have skewed scholars' perceptions of what constitutes racism to encompass only the most egregious examples. In conducting their analyses, scholars may have, even unconsciously, compared the discrimination of the ancient world to the modern and concluded that what existed in the ancient did not meet the distorted standard of "real racism." In the ancient Greco-Roman world, there was no Ku Klux Klan, no legalistic Jim Crow, and although there was slavery, no single race was the target of that institution. However, the absence of these elements does not mean that there was no racism in antiquity.

Across the Greek sources presented here, there is a division between texts that subtly manifest racism in their passing references to black people and texts that explicitly deal in racial theories. Both kinds of texts provide valuable information in

this study, but they convey that information in ways different enough to warrant this division. Some may argue that the first category of texts is irrelevant, and that extracting negative racial feeling from them is overanalyzing. However, while the clues are often subtle, the level of analysis needed to conclude racism from them is no more than what has been done to conclude racial equality. In fact, it is often harder to find a way to conclude that there was no racism than it is to see how they support the argument that there was. Finally, the racist views extrapolated from these texts are only reinforced by the existence of more explicitly racist passages.

One other important element to keep in mind is the potential for innocuous passages in the limited amount of extant sources, which could be argued "outweigh" the negative ones. Blackness and black people are referenced a fair number of times, especially given the number of ancient sources that have been lost, but most of the references are what might be called "throwaway lines" that only serve to associate Ethiopia with blackness. One such line is:

> καὶ μὴν Φοινίκας ἀποτέμνεται ᾿Αρραβίας τε
> καὶ Συρίας Λιβύας τε κελαινῶν τ᾿ Αἰθιοπήων.
>
> More: he [Ptolemy II] takes a share of Phoenicia, of Arabia, of Syria
> and Libya and of the dark-skinned Ethiopians…[55]

A line such as this one mentions Ethiopia and dark skin, but does not, even in context, assign a value or judgment to them. This kind of reference to black people and Ethiopia is the most common, and does not contribute to an analysis of racism in the ancient Greco-Roman world. However, it is not significant that these references to black people do not also attach negative characteristics to them. This is because it would be

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[55] Theocritus, *Idyll 17*, 86-87, trans. Neil Hopkinson in *Theocritus. Moschus. Bion*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 2015.

too much to assume or require that, every time a black person or people were mentioned, the ancient author take time to disparage them. Thus, authors with or without racist tendencies could write lines like the one above in such a way that readers would have no way of extrapolating racial feeling from them. Given that the above kind of reference is the most common kind of occurrence of black people in texts, it is all the more important to interpret the examples where a value judgement is being made.

Finally, there passages that appear at first glance to carry positive messages about black people, especially the Ethiopians of the mythical past. These passages are often cited by modern scholars to indicate that Greek or Roman authors admired the Ethiopians in some ways, and in others respectfully acknowledged their differences. But these supposedly positive pieces of evidence were often either inconclusive or in some way negative. One of the inconclusive passages was written by Philodemus in the first century BCE. It reads:

> Μικκὴ καὶ μελανεῦσα Φιλαίνιον, ἀλλὰ σελίνων
> οὐλοτέρη….
> …
> …
> τοιαύτην στέργοιμι Φιλαίνιον ἄχρις ἂν εὕρω
> ἄλλην, ὦ χρυσέη Κύπρι, τελειοτέρην.

> Philaenium is short and dark, but her hair is more curled than celery….
> Such a Philaenium grant me, golden Cypris, to love – until I find
> another more perfect.[56]

Snowden interpreted these lines as a white Greek man praising a black woman, even calling her "perfect." This interpretation is sound, but does not necessarily support

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[56] Philodemus, *Suurprising Praise for Philaenium, a Courtesan*, trans. W. R. Paton and Michael A. Tueller in *The Greek Anthology: Books 1-5*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 2014.

Snowden's claim that there was no racism or "color prejudice" in the ancient world because, unlike other poems below, it does not contain a reference to the opinion of the wider world. As it stands, this poem only showed that at least one presumably white Greek man loved a black woman, whatever society's restrictions.

Other poems conclusively counter the above poem. The first of these is a third-century BCE poem by Asclepiades which reads:

> Τὠφθαλμῷ Διδύμη με συνήρπασεν· ὤμοι, ἐγὼ δὲ
> τήκομαι ὡς κηρὸς πὰρ πυρὶ κάλλος ὁρῶν.
> εἰ δὲ μέλαινα, τί τοῦτο; καὶ ἄνθρακες· ἀλλ᾽ ὅτε κείνους
> θάλψωμεν, λάμπουσ᾽ ὡς ῥόδεαι κάλυκες.

> Didyme captured me with her eye. Oh! I melt like wax by a fire when I
> see her beauty. If she is black – so what? Coals are too, but when we
> heat them, they glow like rosebuds.[57]

Snowden used this poem to support his theory that there was no racism in the ancient Greco-Roman world.[58] He wrote, "[a]s to the color of the skin and the Greco-Roman concept of beauty, attitudes apparently varied with individuals… Asclepiades praises the beauty of a Didyme…."[59] His analysis is evidently that Asclepiades, presumably – both from demographic probability and poetic context – a white man, loved a black woman. Snowden therefore counted the poem as an example of white Greeks who accepted black people, even so far as to love them intimately. However, the last two lines suggest something entirely different: that, whatever this white man felt about black women, his was not the common view. The most important phrase is the conditional clause in line three. The question, "[i]f she is black – so what?" reveals that the poet finds Didyme beautiful *despite* societal expectations. Asclepiades thus used

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[57] Asclepiades, *On Didyme*.
[58] See page 18.
[59] Snowden, *Blacks in Antiquity*, 178.

the rhetorical question to challenge the apparently common view that black women were not beautiful. And while it may be that Asclepiades was being accepting, the fact that there was an unaccepting view that has to be refuted proves that there was some sort of racial conception of beauty or social divide between black and white people. It is perhaps also noteworthy that the comparison used by the poet, that Didyme is beautiful like glowing coals, involves the lightening of a dark substance. Although it is possibly too far to argue that the poet deliberately chose this comparison because he associated light, brightness, or whiteness with beauty, it is an interesting consideration. Whatever the reader makes of the last line, the overall message is clear: Asclepiades loved Didyme, but this was *despite* her blackness.

A similar poem, by Menander, dates earlier, to the fourth century BCE. It reads:

ὅς ἂν εὖ γεγονὼς ἦ τῇ φύσει πρὸς τἀγαθά,
κἂν Αἰθίοψ ἦ, μῆτερ, ἐστὶν εὐγενής.
Σκύθης τις; ὄλεθρος· ὁ δ' Ἀνάχαρσις οὐ Σκύθης;

The man whose natural bent is good, he, mother, he, though Aethiop, is nobly born. "A Scyth," you say? Pest! Anacharsis was a Scyth![60]

These three lines come at the end of a refutation of "pedigrees" by the speaker to his or her mother. Snowden interpreted these lines as representative of a positive feeling toward black people, writing, "[i]n other words, it is unimportant whether one is as racially different from a Greek as the Ethiopian or Scythian… it is natural bent, not race, that determines nobility."[61] Thus, Snowden concludes that, since the poet was willing to attribute nobility of character to a black person, race and racism did not play

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[60] Menander, *The Man's the Gowd for a' that!*, trans. Francis G. Allinson in *Menander: The Principal Fragments*. (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons), 1921.
[61] Snowden, *Blacks in Antiquity*, 176-177. Scythians were northern people who the Greeks saw as very white. They were often contrasted with Ethiopians and also figured into the climatic racism that will discussed later.

into Greek thought about social position. As before, the deeper implications of these lines are overlooked. For while it is true that Menander expressed, via the speaker, that a black person could be "noble," the concessive clause is vitally important. The speaker specifies that *even though* a person is black, they could be good. This statement presupposes that those who are black are rarely good, which indicates that there was some sort of racist prejudice against black people in this regard. Like the Asclepiades poem, the initial "acceptance" of black people by the author and the speaker in the poem is merely a counter to a prevailing cultural opinion that was in fact racist. This view was apparently widespread, because the humor in both poems operates and is reliant upon the audience having this shared assumption regarding black people.

The above examples suggest that there were prevailing racist attitudes about black people, at least in regard to their fitness as loving partners and their natural character. Importantly, these same pieces of text were previously used to support the conclusion that there was no racism in the ancient Greco-Roman world, but that analysis missed key implications about the ancient world and focused only on the presumed acceptance of the authors. Philodemus' supposedly positive poem thus does not present a strong enough case to overturn the conclusion deriving from these last two poems.

An example of another ostensibly positive passage in fact being negative comes from Herodotus, about whom Snowden wrote, "[he] did not hesitate to call Ethiopians the most handsome people of earth."[62] The cited passage from Herodotus reads:

> οἱ δὲ Αἰθίοπες οὗτοι, ἐς τοὺς ἀπέπεμπε ὁ Καμβύσης, λέγονται εἶναι μέγιστοι καὶ κάλλιστοι ἀνθρώπων πάντων.

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[62] Ibid., 178.

> These Ethiopians, to whom Cambyses sent them, are said to be the
> tallest and [the most beautiful] of all men.[63]

Snowden concluded that Herodotus was referring to a general opinion about Ethiopians, and that a positive attitude toward their physical appearance then argues for a lack of racial prejudice. It is true that associating the positive characteristic of beauty with Ethiopians does suggest racial acceptance, but other factors complicate this reading. Herodotus did not assert this opinion on the Ethiopians as fact, but inserted the circuitous phrase "they say," a technique he used in other passages to report things he had heard but did not believe.[64] Already, then, the supposedly positive opinion of Ethiopians was not being fully endorsed by the author. In addition to this subtlety, Herodotus seems to be focusing here on exotifying the Ethiopians, conducting a kind of ethnography of strange people and places, again potentially constituting a form of racial Othering.[65]

Regardless of the exact connotations of the passage from Herodotus, other examples provided a much clearer and distinctly negative view. One such passage is Philostratus the Elder's *Imagines*, from the second or third century CE. Philostratus here describes the rescue of Andromeda by Perseus:

> Ἡ κόρη δὲ ἡδεῖα μέν, ὅτι λευκὴ ἐν Αἰθιοπίᾳ, ἡδὺ δὲ αὐτὸ τὸ εἶδος·
> παρέλθοι ἂν καὶ Λυδὴν ἁβρὰν καὶ Ἀτθίδα ὑπόσεμνον καὶ Σπαρτιᾶτιν
> ἐρρωμένην… πολλοὶ οἱ βουκόλοι γάλα ὀρέγοντες καὶ οἴνου ἐπισπάσαι,
> ἡδεῖς Αἰθίοπες ἐν τῷ τοῦ χρώματος ἀτόπῳ καὶ βλοσυρὸν μειδιῶντες καὶ
> οὐκ ἄδηλοι χαίρειν καὶ οἱ πλεῖστοι ὅμοιοι.

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[63] Herodotus *The Persian Wars* 3.20.
[64] Ibid. See Marco Dorati, "Travel Writing, Ethnographical Writing, and the Representation of the Edges of the World in Herodotus," ed. Brigitte Truschnegg and Reinhold Bichler, in *Herodotus and the Persian Empire*, ed. Robert Rollinger, 273-312.
[65] For a discussion of Herodotus as a "travel writer," see Dorati, "Travel Writing, Ethnographical Writing, and the Representation of the Edges of the World in Herodotus."

> The maiden is charming in that she is fair of skin though in Ethiopia,
> and charming is the very beauty of her form; she would surpass a
> Lydian girl in daintiness, an Attic girl in stateliness, a Spartan in
> sturdiness… Many cow-herds come offering [Perseus] milk and wine to
> drink, charming Ethiopians with their strange colouring and their grim
> smiles; and they show that they are pleased, and most of them look
> alike.[66]

Snowden isolated the line "charming Ethiopians with their strange color" and used the

phrase to conclude that Philostratus held no racist sentiment. However, there is much

more to this quote than that line alone. First, Philostratus emphasized that Andromeda,

the maiden, is beautiful "in that she is [white] though in Ethiopia."[67] This explicitly

connects beauty with whiteness, and positions that whiteness over the black Ethiopians.

In addition, the more subtle fact that Andromeda is portrayed as white, even though she

is ostensibly Ethiopian, suggests that Philostratus was unable or unwilling to conceive

of a Hellenic mythological figure as black. This indicates that there was a racial

element in the conception of mythical figures. It is possible to argue that Andromeda's

charm resulted because her whiteness was conspicuous, but then one has to explain

why she was white in the first place. As the passage stands, it appears that Andromeda

is white because she is important to the Greeks, who are also posited as largely white,

despite the Ethiopian location. Interestingly, Snowden fixated on the word "charming"

as it referred to the Ethiopians. However, he overlooked the word "strange" and their

"grim smiles." While noting that someone's color is different from yours is not

inherently racist, this passage draws attention to the blackness of Ethiopians as Other

and contains and implied threat: that a white woman might fall into the hands of

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[66] Philostratus, *Imagines*, 336 K. 25-337 K. 6, trans. Arthur Fairbanks in *Philostratus the Elder, Imagines. Philostratus the Younger, Imagines. Callistratus, Descriptions.* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 1931.
[67] Ibid.

barbaric black men. Finally, although it is perhaps too much to say that Philostratus'

comment that most black people look alike is explicitly racist, especially given his

presumable lack of exposure to black people, it is disturbingly similar to modern

stereotypes that members of nonwhite races resemble each other. Snowden did notice

this similarity and implied that it is problematic, but he then asserted that "Ethiopians

may have looked alike to Philostratus, but not to most Greeks and Romans" without

citing any evidence.[68] In the end, the content of Philostratus' *Imagines* included the

alignment of whiteness with beauty and blackness with negative qualities, thereby

manifesting a racist attitude.

Another prose example is Pseudo-Callisthenes' *The Alexander Romance*, which

dates to the third century CE. Here, Alexander the Great is described as writing a letter

to an Ethiopian queen named Candace, who replies:

> μὴ καταγνῷς δὲ τοῦ χρώματος ἡμῶν· ἐσμὲν γὰρ λευκότεροι καὶ
> λαμπρότεροι ταῖς ψυχαῖς τῶν παρὰ σοῦ λευκοτάτων.

> "[d]o not despise us for the colour of our skin. In our souls we are
> brighter than the whitest of your people."[69]

The fact that Candace has to ask Alexander to "not despise" the Ethiopian people for

their blackness is telling in itself, as this suggests that racial hatred was common

enough to be expected by the character and understood by the reader. But Pseudo-

Callisthenes, through Candace, goes on to equate whiteness of skin with positive

qualities of soul. By saying "in our souls," Candace was drawing an implicit

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[68] Snowden, *Blacks in Antiquity*, 3.
[69] Pseudo-Callisthenes, *The Alexander Romance,* trans. by Richard Stoneman, *The Greek Alexander Romance*, (London: Penguin Books), 1991, 136 with Greek text from "Alexander Romance ("Pseudo-Callisthenes")." Alexander Romance. Accessed April 20, 2018.
http://www.attalus.org/info/alexander.html, 3.18.

connection between the skin and the soul and thus, by using this metaphor, was

equating whiteness with goodness and thus blackness with evil.[70] Snowden ignored this

section entirely, instead choosing to focus on a line calling Candace "a woman of

remarkable beauty."[71] This statement appears incongruous with the passage's later

racism, but it can be related back to the exotic ethnography of Herodotus. And just as

the passage from Herodotus is overshadowed by other more clearly racist examples,

this reference to Candace is countered by the line about the whiteness of soul.

Lastly, there is a passage written in Greek by Appian, a Roman citizen in the

first century CE. These details situate Appian in the current chapter, since he wrote in

Greek, while they also align him with the Roman world, given his Imperial context:

> Ἐξιόντι δὲ τῷ στρατῷ πρὸ τῶν πυλῶν αἰθίοψ ὑπήντησε· καὶ τόνδε μὲν
> ὡς οἰώνισμα φαῦλον ὁ στρατὸς αὐτίκα συνέκοψε…

> When the soldiers were going out to the fight an Ethiopian met them in
> front of the gates, and as they considered this a bad omen they
> immediately cut him in pieces.[72]

The actions of these Roman soldiers reveal that blackness was considered an ominous

sign. This example is particularly noteworthy because it is the only recorded example

of someone being killed directly because of their race.

The examples cited above thus exemplify a Greek attitude toward black people

arranged in an order of decreasing subtlety. These sources show that, despite the

feelings of some individuals, black people, when encountered, were generally

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[70] The internal whiteness of a black person as signifying goodness also appeared in Christian texts. See Thompson, *Romans and Blacks*, 41.

[71] Pseudo-Callisthenes, *The Alexander Romance,* trans. Richard Stoneman, 135.

[72] Appian, *Roman History: The Civil Wars* IV.134, trans. Horace White (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 1913.

considered undesirable as partners, incompatible with beauty, and associated with a

defective soul.

The next texts are among the clearest statements of anti-black racism among

Greek sources. Diodorus Siculus, in the first century BCE, presented two different

accounts of people he called "Ethiopians," and with two very different judgements.

One group he praised. A section from his work *The Library of History* reads:

> φασὶ δὲ παρ' αὐτοῖς πρώτοις καταδειχθῆναι θεοὺς τιμᾶν καὶ θυσίας
> ἐπιτελεῖν καὶ πομπὰς καὶ πανηγύρεις καὶ τἄλλα δι' ὧν ἄνθρωποι τὸ
> θεῖον τιμῶσι· διὸ καὶ τὴν παρ' αὐτοῖς εὐσεβίαν διαβεβοῆσθαι παρὰ
> πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις, καὶ δοκεῖν τὰς παρ' Αἰθίοψι θυσίας μάλιστ' εἶναι τῷ
> δαιμονίῳ κεχαρισμένας… λέγουσι δὲ καὶ τῆς εἰς τὸ θεῖον εὐσεβίας
> φανερῶς αὐτοὺς κομίζεσθαι τὰς χάριτας, μηδέποτε δεσποτείας
> ἐπήλυδος πεῖραν λαβόντας· ἐξ αἰῶνος γὰρ ἐν ἐλευθερίᾳ μεμενηκέναι
> καὶ τῇ πρὸς ἀλλήλους ὁμονοίᾳ, πολλῶν μὲν καὶ δυνατῶν
> ἐστρατευκότων ἐπ' αὐτούς, μηδενὸς δὲ τῆς ἐπιβολῆς καθικομένου.

> And they say that they [the Ethiopians] were the first to be taught to
> honor the gods and to hold sacrifices and processions and festivals and
> the other rites by which men honor the deity; and that in consequence,
> their piety has been published abroad among all men, and it is generally
> held that the sacrifices practised among the Ethiopians are those which
> are the most pleasing to heaven… [a]nd they state that, by reason of
> their piety towards the deity, they manifestly enjoy the favour of the
> gods, inasmuch as they have never experienced the rule of an invader
> from abroad; for from all time they have enjoyed a state of freedom and
> of peace one with another, and although many and powerful rulers have
> made war upon them, not one of these has succeeded in his
> undertaking.[73]

Here, Diodorus ostensibly assigned positive characteristics to the Ethiopians, with

particular emphasis on their antiquity and piety. However, while the overall message of

the passage may appear to be positive, it is tainted with the phrase "they say," and, as

in Herodotus, this serves to distance the author from the recorded opinions. Even if the

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[73] Diodorus Siculus, *The Library of History* III.2.2-4, trans. C. H. Oldfather, (Cambridge: Harvard
University Press), 1935.

positive aspects outweigh the negative in the passage above, its existence is

complicated by a section that followed it:

> Ἔστι δὲ καὶ ἄλλα γένη τῶν Αἰθιόπων παμπληθῆ, τὰ μὲν ἐξ ἀμφοτέρων
> τῶν μερῶν τὴν παραποτάμιον τοῦ Νείλου κατοικοῦντα καὶ τὰς ἐν τῷ
> ποταμοῦ νήσους… οἱ πλεῖστοι δὲ τούτων καὶ μάλισθ' οἱ παρὰ τὸν
> ποταμὸν οἰκοῦντες ταῖς μὲν χρόαις εἰσὶ μέλανες, ταῖς δὲ ἰδέαις σιμοί,
> τοῖς δὲ τριχώμασιν οὖλοι. καὶ ταῖς μὲν ψυχαῖς παντελῶς ὑπάρχουσιν
> ἄγριοι καὶ τὸ θηριῶδες ἐμφαίνοντες, οὐχ οὕτω δὲ τοῖς θυμοῖς ὡς τοῖς
> ἐπιτηδεύμασιν· αὐχμηροὶ γὰρ ὄντες τοῖς ὅλοις σώμασι τοὺς μὲν ὄνυχας
> ἐπὶ πολὺ παρηγμένους ἔχουσι τοῖς θηρίοις παραπλησίως, τῆς δὲ πρὸς
> ἀλλήλους φιλανθρωπίας πλεῖστον ὅσον ἀφεστήκασι· καὶ τὴν μὲν φωνὴν
> ὀξεῖαν προβάλλοντες, τῶν δὲ παρὰ τοῖς ἄλλοις ἐπιτηδευομένων εἰς βίον
> ἥμερον οὐδ' ὁτιοῦν ἔχοντες, μεγάλην ποιοῦσι πρὸς τὰ καθ' ἡμᾶς ἔθη
> τὴν διαφοράν.

> But there are also a great many other tribes of the Ethiopians [in
> addition to those who are pious], some of them dwelling in the land
> lying on both banks of the Nile and on the islands in the river… The
> majority of them, and especially those who dwell along the river, are
> black in colour and have flat noses and woolly hair. As for their spirit
> they are entirely savage and display the nature of a wild beast, not so
> much, however, in their temper as in their ways of living; for they are
> squalid all over their bodies, they keep their nails very long like the wild
> beasts, and are as far removed as possible from human kindness to one
> another; and speaking as they do with a shrill voice and cultivating none
> of the practices of civilized life as these are found among the rest of
> mankind, they present a striking contrast when considered in the light of
> our own customs.[74]

The content of this passage completely contradicts whatever positive aspects the

previous one contained. Here, Ethiopians are "savage," dirty, bestial, and uncivilized.

Importantly, unlike in the other passage, here Diodorus also emphasizes physical

characteristics such as black skin, flat noses, and wooly hair, and thus implicitly

suggests a connection between those features and the negative attributes he ascribes to

these people. The physical characteristics are especially important since they were

absent in the previous passage. The question is then how to reconcile these two

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[74] Ibid., III.8.1-3.

passages by the same author. In one method of response, Snowden, although he acknowledged both passages, chose to repeatedly emphasize the one that portrayed the Ethiopians as "civilized."[75] In Snowden's analysis of the two passages, he wrote, "[s]imilarly, the Greeks were acquainted with primitive Ethiopians living beyond Napata and Meroë… [but this knowledge] did not cause the Greeks to overlook the more developed Ethiopians who inhabited Meroë and the land adjoining Egypt."[76] The unsatisfying conclusion is that the Greeks were not racist because at least some of the Ethiopians were characterized as "civilized." This conclusion largely ignores the implications of the second passage, especially with its explicit reference to blackness. In addition, it disregards the detail that the more "civilized" Ethiopians live in an area closer to the lands of Hellenic superiority, which hints at climatic racism.[77] When taken together, the second passage's closer association with blackness itself suggests that racism was the prevailing view for Diodorus. Even if the passages are counted at equal weight, with the first somehow canceling out the second, the negative one had a larger body of backing opinion.

In addition to Diodorus' extensive passages on the subject, Aristotle, who lived in the fourth century BCE, also mentions black people briefly in his works. A section from his *Physiognomics* reads:

Οἱ ἄγαν μέλανες δειλοί· ἀναφέρεται ἐπὶ τοὺς Αἰγυπτίους, Αἰθίοπας. οἱ δὲ λευκοὶ ἄγαν δειλοί· ἀναφέρεται ἐπὶ τὰς γυναῖκας.

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[75] Snowden, *Blacks in Antiquity*. Snowden acknowledges both on page 109 but reference only the first on pages 119, 136, and 146.
[76] Ibid., 180.
[77] See pages 35-37.

> Those who are too swarthy are cowardly; this applies to Egyptians and Ethiopians. But the excessively fair [i.e., white] are also cowardly; witness women.[78]

This passage explicitly links black skin to negative characteristics while also, interestingly, applying the same to very light skin, ideas that persisted in the Roman period. Snowden noted this passage but did not analyze it, instead only implying that since the negative opinion about black skin was coupled with the same about white skin, that there was no discernable racist feeling. Like in other parts of Snowden's work, this conclusion ignores the possibility that there was racism against black people operating alongside other systems of oppression. Just because the extreme opposite was also true does not discount the assertion of the original point.

This methodological fallacy, discounting racism against black people when coupled with negative assertions about people of the opposite extreme of color, also appears in analyses of climatic racial theories, in which the supposed natural characteristics of groups of people were explained by environmental and climatic factors. The idea that the climate influenced the physical and mental states of certain people originated with Hippocrates of Cos in the fifth century BCE. In the treatise, *Airs Waters Places*, the climates and attributes of the ancient geographic continents of Europe and Asia are compared in the following manner:

> τὴν Ἀσίην πλεῖστον διαφέρειν φημὶ τῆς Εὐρώπης ἐς τὰς φύσιας τῶν
> συμπάντων τῶν τε ἐκ τῆς γῆς φυομένων καὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων… ἥ τε χώρη
> τῆς χώρης ἡμερωτέρη καὶ τὰ ἤθεα τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἠπιώτερα καὶ
> εὐοργητότερα. τὸ δὲ αἴτιον τούτων ἡ κρῆσις τῶν ὡρέων, ὅτι τοῦ ἡλίου
> ἐν μέσῳ τῶν ἀνατολέων κεῖται πρὸς τὴν ἠῶ τοῦ τε ψυχροῦ πορρωτέρω.

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[78] Aristotle, *Physiognomics*, 6.812a, trans. W. S. Hett in *Minor Works: On Colours. On Things Heard. Physiognomics. On Plants. On Marvellous Things Heard. Mechanical Problems. On Indivisible Lines. The Situations and Names of Winds. On Melissus, Xenophanes, Gorgias*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 1936.

I hold that Asia differs very widely from Europe in the nature of all its inhabitants and of all its vegetation… the one region is less wild than the other, the character of the inhabitants is milder and more gentle. The cause of this is the temperate climate, because it lies towards the east midway between the risings of the sun, and farther away than is Europe from the cold.[79]

Hippocrates thus asserted a form of environmental determinism, attributing the characteristics he perceived to be "Asian" and "European" to respective climatic zones. Importantly, these attributes constitute biased and racialized misconceptions and stereotypes about Asia, which Hippocrates then worked to validate using a pseudo-scientific method. This same method was adopted by later Greeks and applied to Africa and Africans. One example of this phenomenon comes from Claudius Ptolemy's *Tetrabiblos*, written in the second century CE. It contains the following passage:

τῆς γὰρ καθ᾽ ἡμᾶς οἰκουμένης ἐν ἑνὶ τῶν βορείων τεταρτημορίων οὔσης, οἱ μὲν ὑπὸ τοὺς νοτιωτέρους παραλλήλους, λέγω δὲ τοὺς ἀπὸ τοῦ ἰσημερινοῦ μέχρι τοῦ θερινοῦ τροπικοῦ, κατὰ κορυφὴν λαμβανόντες τὸν ἥλιον καὶ διακαιόμενοι, μέλανες τὰ σώματα καὶ τὰς τρίχας οὖλοί τε καὶ δασεῖς καὶ τὰς μορφὰς συνεσπασμένοι καὶ τὰ μεγέθη συντετηγμένοι καὶ τὰς φύσεις θερμοὶ καὶ τοῖς ἤθεσιν ὡς ἐπὶ πᾶν ἄγριοι τυγχάνουσι διὰ τὴν ὑπὸ καύματος συνέχειαν τῶν οἰκήσεων, οὓς δὴ καλοῦμεν κοινῶς Αἰθίοπας.

For while the region which we [the Greeks] inhabit is in one of the northern quarters, the people who live under the more southern parallels, that is, those from the equator to the summer tropic, since they have the sun over their heads and are burned by it, have black skins and thick, woolly hair, are contracted in form and shrunken in stature, are sanguine of nature, and in habits are for the most part savage because their homes are continually oppressed by heat; we call them by the general name Ethiopians.[80]

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[79] Hippocrates of Cos, *Airs Waters Places*, XII, trans. W. H. S. Jones in *Ancient Medicine. Airs, Waters, Places. Epidemics 1 and 3. The Oath. Precepts. Nutriment*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 1923.

[80] Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos* II.2, trans. F. E. Robbins, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 1940.

Here, Ptolemy displays the hallmarks of environmental or climatic racism in the tradition of Hippocrates. Ptolemy posits a burning effect caused by the adjacency of the sun to "the more southern parallels," i.e. Africa, which causes the skin to be made dark, the hair to be thick and curled, and for the people to be "shrunken in stature." He adds to these outward physical attributes the internal characteristics of a "sanguine" disposition and savagery. Ptolemy thus inextricably connects blackness with defective character states, effectively making blackness a marker of inferiority. This approach is clearly racist, and parallels more modern racial "science" that similarly saw blackness as a designator of an inherently lower state of being. Snowden, as can be expected, did not see this as evidence of racism. Instead, he wrote:

> [t]he Greeks and Romans, in explanation of the physical differences
> which they recognized between themselves and other races… accounted
> for the characteristics of the Ethiopian by an environment theory in the
> same way as they explained the characteristics of the Scythians,
> Thracians, of any people who were unlike themselves.[81]

Snowden thus suggested that, since environmental racism was not unique to Greek conceptions of black people, "[t]he Greeks and Romans attached no special stigma to color, regarding yellow hair or blue eyes [as Scythians were seen to have] a mere geographical accident, and developed no special racial theory about the inferiority of darker peoples qua darker peoples."[82] The perceived lack of a "special racial theory" against black people eliminated for Snowden the possibility that ancient racism existed. This view, however, does did consider the fact that racism against one group does not preclude racism against another that modern people perceive to be logically opposite and thus inevitably superior.

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[81] Snowden, *Blacks in Antiquity*, 175.
[82] Ibid., 176.

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Ancient environmental determinism, as seen above, was therefore an early form of "scientific" racism. As such, it did not successfully demonstrate the inferiority of some races but instead displayed the already present racism in the society, which was then justified and granted meaning by way of a constructed "logic." This "scientific" dimension of ancient racist thought ultimately complemented and reflected the racist attitudes of the society that were left unquestioned and were manifested in "unscientific" work.

The literary evidence, though at times subtle, suggests that there was in fact racism against black Africans in the ancient Greco-Roman world. This racism was expressed in multiple ways, many of which should be familiar to a modern reader. These ways included the general preference for white partners, the coinciding idea that white was more beautiful than black, the whitewashing of mythological figures reported to be from Ethiopia, the suggestion that black people looked the same, and the equation of blackness with inferiority of character and whiteness with purity and excellence. These tropes, all extant in modern society and familiar to modern readers, were augmented by the ancient theory of climatic determinism, which was really an early form of "scientific" racism expressing deeply held principles of ancient Greco-Roman society. Some scholars have examined the same pieces of evidence and concluded that there was no racism in the ancient world. The reasons for this conclusion are complex, and will be explored later in Chapter Four. Generally, these reasons can be summed up as a combination of the skewing effect of subsequent modern layers of racism, accompanied by a desire to prove the fallibility of racism or simply by willful obliviousness. In light of these fallacious conclusions, it is important to remember the

following points. First, racism does not equal physical brutality and slavery. In other words, just because there is no surviving Greek literary evidence of what we today would called "hate crimes," that does not mean that there was an absence of racism. It is possible some of the scholars who have previously worked on this subject looked for brutality that they did not find, and came to their erroneous conclusions. Second, one must remember that racism from any time period is an invention. The fact that it existed in the ancient Greco-Roman world should not give it any validity despite the status that the study of the Classical world has held in the past. There should be no need to appeal to the ancient past to discredit racism. Thirdly, and relatedly, scholars who study the ancient world have the obligation to see its flaws as well as its successes, especially since those flaws have had a way of surviving into and being appropriated for modern deployment.

Chapter 3: Latin Literary Sources

Ancient anti-black racism was not only confined to the Greek-speaking world; it was also found in Rome and its empire. All the same restrictions that bounded ancient Greek racism also apply here. In particular, this includes the existence of a number of supposedly innocuous references to black people that make no positive or negative claim on them as well as racism manifested on a level of brutality that was to be far surpassed by more modern racism displayed in the Transatlantic Slave Trade and by white terrorist groups. Again, it must be noted that the absence of extreme brutality or the existence of references to black people that cannot be construed as racist do not mean that racism was absent in a given society. With these points in mind and after examining the evidence, it is clear that there was in fact racism in ancient Rome.

Like the Greek sources, the Latin ones will be divided into sections based on the severity or explicitness of the racism in the text. The first group that will be considered contains references that, at first glance, appear neutral or even positive in their views of black people. It will be shown, however, that these references are potentially problematic or at the least do not outweigh negative characterizations and, correspondingly, that previous modern readings of them, which consider them to be evidence of racial acceptance, overlook aspects of the text. The second group extends from and blends into the first. This group contains passages that have previously been read as either innocuous or even celebrated as progressive, but that can be shown to subtly express or indicate racist sentiment. The last group contains more explicitly racist statements, ones that have seemingly been ignored by previous scholars. Each section contains various types of literary material, from epigrammatic poetry to natural

history to biography, which extend from the mid first century BCE to the seventh century CE. While this is a period of many hundreds of years, the sentiments expressed in the texts are coherent, and even echo the examples in Greek. These consistencies demonstrate the pervasiveness of anti-black racism in the ancient Greco-Roman world.

The first group of passages contains references that appear to be neutral or even positive representations of black people. The first of these is a description of Ethiopian people by Pliny the Elder in his *Natural History* of the first century CE:

> *namque et Aethiopas vicini sideris vapore torreri adustisque similis gigni barba et capillo vibrato non est dubium... illas mobilitate sapientes; ipsoque crurum argumento illis in supera sucum revocari natura vaporis... medio vero terrae... ritus molles, sensus liquidos, ingenia fecunda totiusque naturae capacis, isdem imperia, quae numquam extimis gentibus fuerint...*

> For it is beyond question that the Ethiopians are burnt by the heat of the heavenly body near them, and are born with a scorched appearance, with curly beard and hair… [and] these [people are] wise because of the mobility [of their climate]; and their legs themselves prove that with [Ethiopians] the juice is called away into the upper portions of the body by nature of heat… [and] in the middle of the earth… customs are gentle, senses clear, intellects fertile and able to grasp the whole of nature; and [those in the middle] also have governments, which the outer races never have possessed....[83]

This passage can be mistaken as expressing a "positive" view of black people, given that it says Ethiopians are "wise," especially if that section of the passage is looked at in isolation from the rest. In fact, this passage has been used to support a conclusion of the "lack of color antipathy."[84] Snowden, for example, listed this passage in a series of sources thought to prove a general reverence for Ethiopians as held by Greeks and Romans, and he thus focused only on Pliny's attribution of wisdom.[85] But the link to

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[83] Pliny, *Natural History* II.80, trans. H. Rackham, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 1938.
[84] Snowden, *Blacks in Antiquity*, 180.
[85] Ibid.

earlier Greek climatic theories, including their prejudices, is very much apparent here. The structure of the argument is the same as before: namely, that black people have dark skin and curly hair because of the heat of the sun and that the climatic conditions of Africa are not conducive to civilization. On the other hand, those who live "in the middle," the Romans, are portrayed as naturally superior in character and society. While the biased views are not as explicit as in Diodorus Siculus, Pliny nevertheless establishes a dichotomy ordained by nature between black Africans and white Romans, with black people being inferior and imagined as far from the "correctness" of the "center" of the world, Rome. While Pliny may be less acerbic than Diodorus, he still perpetuated climatic racism and his situating of Ethiopians on the fringes of the world might be understood as part of the Roman imperial narrative in which those closer to Rome possessed inherent positive characteristics. There is also a curious similarity between the Pliny's and Diodorus' works on Ethiopians: both contain contradictions. Just as Diodorus presented two drastically different images of Ethiopians, Pliny denigrates black people while simultaneously calling Ethiopians "wise." Once again, however, whatever seemingly positive qualities exist in the text either carry negative implications or are overshadowed by negative features from within the same work.

The second Latin source that appears to be positive is one of Martial's epigrams from the first century CE:

> *sed quandam volo nocte nigriorem,*
> *formica, pice, graculo, cicada.*

> But I want a certain girl, one darker than night, or [an] ant, or pitch, or crow, or cricket.[86]

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[86] Martial, *Epigrams* 1.115.4-5, trans. D. R. Shackleton Bailey, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 1993.

Here, Martial expresses his desire for a black woman, and does so without implying that blackness was generally undesirable as in similar Greek sources.[87] However, this positive comment must be tempered with his other references to black people, specifically black women, which are shown below. These contradictions, combined with the familiar caution that one person's apparent acceptance does not mean a society's approval, necessitate a reconsideration of Snowden's assertion that this text represents an "expressed preference" for blackness.[88]

A second group of sources more clearly demonstrates racist sentiment. As mentioned above, most of Martial's references to black people fall into this category. Examining a few will give a more complete picture of the poet's views on black people. The majority of these relate to the theme of a black person who desires to be white. In all of these poems, Martial's subject is a woman named Lycoris and, in each case, she is viewed with a combination of pity and contempt. One poem reads:

> *Nostris versibus esse te poetam,*
> *Fidentine, putas cupisque credi?*
> *sic dentata sibi videtur Aegle*
> *emptis ossibus Indicoque cornu;*
> *sic, quae nigrior est cadente moro,*
> *cerussata sibi placet Lycoris.*
>
> Fidentinus, do you take yourself for a poet on the strength of *my* verses
> and want it believed? Just so Aegle thinks she has teeth in virtue of
> purchased bones and Indian horn. Just so Lycoris, who is blacker than a
> falling mulberry, fancies herself in white lead.[89]

Martial compares the failures of Fidentinus in poetry to the failure of Lycoris in beauty. Fidentinus is lacking in poetic skill, and so uses something that is not his – namely,

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87 See page 25.
88 Snowden, *Blacks in Antiquity*, 179.
89 Martial, *Epigrams* I.72.1-6.

Martial's verses – in order to appear better. Similarly, Lycoris seeks to "correct" her flaw, her blackness, by using white powder. Fidentinus is seen as a pathetic and contemptible character; pathetic because he does not have skill and contemptible because of his plagiarism. This characterization is then transferred onto those with whom he is compared, namely Aegle and Lycoris. The poem expresses racism in that the poet considers blackness a flaw to be corrected, while also characterizing the pursuit of "correction" as something as foolish as Fidentinus trying to pass of Martial's poetry as his own and as ridiculous as Aegle believing she has teeth. These comparisons suggest that Lycoris' blackness is something permanently damaging to her. Furthermore, in the same way that certain Greek poems indicate a more widely-held societal view, the fact that Martial references skin-whitening suggests that this phenomenon would have been known to his readers, which in turn indicates that, like in the present day, blackness was seen as a detriment to beauty. Of course, negative judgements on female beauty were not the extent of ancient racism any more than they encompass the full range of modern racism.

A final important note about this poem concerns debates over the exact meaning of the word "nigrior," here translated as "blacker" and understood to refer to black skin. Some have translated the word *niger* and its opposite *candidus* in similar contexts as "brunette" and "blonde."[90] Given that this poem specifically mentions Lycoris using powdered lead to whiten herself, something that was applied to the skin and not the hair, it is clear that Lycoris was concerned with her dark skin, not her dark hair. This

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[90] Snowden, *Blacks in Antiquity*, 321.

conclusion is important because it allows for the rejection of the translation of Poem

VII.13 made by Bohn's Classical Library which refers to Lycoris "the brunette."[91]

Lycoris' story was continued in later books of the *Epigrams*. Poems IV.62 and

VII.13 were two versions of the same poem, the more complete one reading:

> *Dum Tiburtinis albescere solibus audit*
> *antiqui dentis fusca Lycoris ebur,*
> *venit in Herculeos colles. quid Tiburis alti*
> *aura valet! parvo tempore nigra redit.*

> Hearing that the ivory of an ancient tusk turns white in the suns of
> Tibur, dusky Lycoris went to Hercules' hills. How potent is the air of
> lofty Tibur! In a short time she returned black.[92]

Again, Lycoris was on a quest to mitigate her blackness. And again, the joke of the

poem is that she cannot change her status as a black woman. The immutability of her

condition is highlighted by the ineffectiveness of the "potent" airs of Tibur, either in

that they failed to turn Lycoris white or that their effect wore off after a short time. The

last four words then deliver Lycoris' punishment for her impossible desire, played as a

joke for the reader. Thus, like the first poem from Martial, this epigram indicates first

that blackness was considered an undesirable trait and additionally suggests that

blackness was an insurmountable obstacle.

Anti-blackness is also demonstrated in poems in which people are shown or

encouraged to avoid referring to someone as black and instead use a euphemistic term.

The first of these is in Lucretius' *On the Nature of Things* from the first century BCE:

> *nam faciunt homines plerumque cupidine caeci*
> *et tribuunt ea quae non sunt his commoda vere.*
> *multimodis igitur pravas turpisque videmus*

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[91] Bohn's Classical Library as reproduced in Martial, Epigrams. Accessed April 20, 2018.
http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/martial_epigrams_00eintro.htm.
[92] Martial, *Epigrams* VII.13.

esse in deliciis summoque in honore vigere....
...
...
...
nigra "melichrus" est...

For this is what men usually do when blinded with desire, and they attribute to women advantages which they really have not. Thus women that are in many ways crooked, and ugly we often see to be thought darlings and to be held in the highest honor....The black girl is a nut-brown maid...[93]

Here, Lucretius comments that, when in love, men do not see a woman's true faults. The first in his list of examples is a man overlooking the "fact" that a woman's blackness makes her undesirable, and calling her something else instead.[94] Like the Martial passages above, this poem suggests that blackness was considered a physical fault. This is further confirmed by a passage in Ovid's *Art of Love*, written in the first century CE:

Nominibus mollire licet mala: fusca vocetur,
Nigrior Illyrica cui pice sanguis erit....

With names you can soften shortcomings; let her be called swarthy, whose blood is blacker than Illyrian pitch....[95]

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[93] Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things* IV.1153-1160, trans. W. H. D. Rouse and Martin F. Smith, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 1924.
[94] Interestingly, the above translation, taken from the Loeb Classical Library, renders *melichrus* as "nut-brown maid." This injects a notion of servitude into the text that is not there in the original. The entry for *melichrus* in the Oxford Latin Dictionary instead lists "honey-coloured" and "the name of a precious stone" as definitions. Applying these definitions, it is more clear that the poem suggests euphemizing a woman's blackness. The translation in the Loeb edition also illustrates the occasional tendency for modern translations to insert modern assumptions about black people into the text: the translator presumably made the woman a "maid" because that was the status he was used to giving black people.
[95] Ovid, *The Art of Love* II.567-568.

Once again, a poet suggests the use of what is apparently a euphemism to "soften" the "shortcoming" of blackness.[96] These two examples show that Roman conceptions of beauty were tied to race, with bias against black people.

There are Roman sources, just as there are Greek ones, that present people who are presumably white being attracted to black people. Snowden claimed that this phenomenon showed that, when it comes "to the color of the skin and the Greco-Roman concept of beauty, attitudes apparently varied with individuals."[97] He cited three main Latin examples of individual poets referencing their love for or attraction to black women, namely Ovid's *Amores* II.8, Martial's *Epigrams* I.115, and Propertius' *Elegies* II.25.[98] However, while all these poems did feature a white man expressing desire for a black woman, they all presented those desires as personal instances, without the implications for societal norms that are evident in their other poems that expressed racism. In *Amores* II.8, Ovid wrote about his love for Cypassis. The poem was not focused on her race, which only appears in the lines:

> *Pro quibus officiis pretium mihi dulce repende*
> *concubitus hodie, fusca Cypassi, tuos!*
>
> In return for these offices to you, dusky Cypassis, pay me to-day the
> sweet price of your caress![99]

While Cypassis' race is not portrayed as a negative in this poem, the poem also does not contain implications for her race, positive or negative, that suggest the attitude of the larger society. This is different from the negative passages referenced above. In

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[96] Interestingly, this implies that *fuscus* and *niger* were not equivalent, and possibly that *fuscus* was a lighter shade of black. This would then mean that Roman thought was not only racist but also colorist, with preference given to lighter black people in the same way as in the present day.
[97] Snowden, *Blacks in Antiquity*, 178.
[98] Ibid., 179.
[99] Ovid, *Amores* II.8.21-22, trans. Grant Showerman and G. P. Goold, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 1914.

those passages, it is possible to extrapolate the views of Roman society from the

attitudes of individual authors. For example, when Ovid advised his readers to "soften

shortcomings" by euphemistically referring to blackness, it showed that this view of

blackness as a shortcoming was common because he expected his advice and examples

to be accepted and understood by his general readership. In the poem about Cypassis,

however, the implication was only that white Ovid was attracted to this black woman,

which, as discussed above, does not even prove Ovid's lack of racism, much less the

racial acceptance in all of Roman society. Similarly, Martial's *Epigrams* I.115, as cited

above, only shows that in that particular instance Martial was attracted to a black

woman, and does not mean that the general attitude of anti-blackness that can be

extrapolated from his other epigrams is undone. Finally, the relevant lines of Propertius

are:

> *vidisti pleno teneram candore puellam,*
> *vidisti fuscam, ducit uterque color….*
>
> You have seen a pretty girl of fair complexion, or again a swarthy
> beauty: either hue attracts you….[100]

Once again, the context of these lines suggests only that someone who was presumably

white was attracted to a black woman, and although there is not a directly contrasting

passage of Propertius that can be compared with this one, the examples from other

authors fulfill that role.

There is one more type of reference to black people that falls into this second

degree of severity. Various works record the superstition that seeing a black person was

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[100] Propertius, *Elegies* II.25.41-42, trans. G. P. Goold, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 1990.

dangerous or foreshadowed bad fortune. One such work is Juvenal's *Satires*, from the

first century CE:

> *...tibi pocula cursor*
> *Gaetulus dabit aut nigri manus ossea Mauri*
> *et cui per mediam nolis occurrere noctem,*
> *clivosae veheris dum per monumenta Latinae.*

> And your cup will be handed to you by a Gaetulian footman or the bony
> hand of a dark Moroccan, a character you'd not want to run into in the
> middle of the night while being conveyed past the tombs on the hilly
> Latin Way.[101]

Here, a potential nighttime encounter with a black man is portrayed as dangerous.[102]

While it is true that Juvenal may have found any nighttime encounter dangerous, he

specifically chose to highlight the man's blackness and immediately follow that up by

commenting that to meet him would be undesirable. This passage on its own does not

confirm that there was a general anxiety or superstition about meeting black people;

however, the following section from the *Historia Augusta* provides more context for

Juvenal's remark:

> *Aethiops quidam e numero militari, clarae inter scurras famae et*
> *celebratorum semper iocorum, cum corona e cupressu facta eidem*
> *occurrit... ille iratus removeri ab oculis praecepisset, et coloris eius*
> *tactus omine et coronae...*

> An Ethiopian soldier, who was famous among buffoons and always a
> notable jester, met him with a garland of cypress-boughs… Severus in a
> rage ordered that the man be removed from his sight, troubled as he was
> by the man's ominous colour and the ominous nature of the garland...[103]

This passage explicitly refers to blackness as "ominous" and the encounter with a black

man is taken to be a bad omen. While this incident is purported to have occurred some

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[101] Juvenal, *Satires* V.53-55.
[102] Snowden affirms that *Maurus* could refer to a black person on page 11 of *Blacks in Antiquity*.
[103] *Historia Augusta* XXII.4-5, trans. David Magie, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 1924.

time after Juvenal's *Satires* were written, this passage suggests that it was this surviving superstition that black people are ominous that Juvenal was referencing when he wrote his work.

These references to black people as bad omens also relate back to the earlier example in Greek about a man who was killed by soldiers for being in the wrong place at the wrong time.[104] Given that these soldiers were actually Roman, there is continuity between the works of Juvenal and the passage of the *Historia Augusta*, thus demonstrating the prevalence of this line of thinking in Roman society as a whole.

These three passages show that black people were sometimes regarded as dangerous or ominous because of their skin color. Even so, these passages have been overlooked in previous modern scholarship on the matter. Snowden, for example, referenced the incident with the black soldier, but focused only on his joking nature, writing "[a] Negro soldier, renowned for his wit, was among the troops of Septimius Severus in Britain."[105] This statement ignores the issue of the blackness of the Ethiopian soldier in Appian being a deeply ominous figure. Snowden did mention the negative characterization of the joking soldier, as well as the one in Appian's account, but he dismissed these as anomalous occurrences, concluding that the belief that black people were bad omens only existed in "certain circles," even though Appian and the others would have had to be referencing a known phenomenon for their works to be understood by their audiences.[106] While this notion clearly does not appear in every

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[104] See page 31.
[105] Snowden, "The Negro in Classical Italy," 285.
[106] Snowden, *Blacks in Antiquity*, 179.

source that mentions a black person, its appearance in multiple sources does show that it was an established racist stereotype.

In addition to the above examples, and further solidifying the fact that Greco-Roman anti-black racism was a pervasive force rather than unfortunate, yet isolated, prejudices, there are texts that explicitly assign negative characteristics to black people because of their race. The first of these, Vitruvius' *On Architecture* from the first century BCE, employs Greek climatic theory:

> *qui autem sunt proximi ad axem meridianum subiectique solis cursui, brevioribus corporibus, colore fusco, crispo capillo, oculis nigris, cruribus validis, sanguine exiguo solis impetu perficiuntur. Itaque etiam propter sanguinis exiguitatem timidiores sunt ferro resistere, sed ardores ac febres subferunt sine timore, quod nutrita sunt eorum membra cum fervore; itaque corpora, quae nascuntur sub septentrione, a febri sunt timidiora et inbecilla, sanguinis autem abundantia ferro resistunt sine timore.*

> Those, however, who are nearest to the southern climes and under the sun's orbit, owing to his violence, have a smaller stature, dark complexion, curly hair, black eyes, strong legs, and thinness of blood. Therefore, also, because of their thin blood, they fear to resist the sword, but endure heat and fever without fear, because their limbs are nourished by heat. Those persons who are born under a northern sky, are weak and more timid in face of fever, but fearlessly resist the sword owing to their fullness of blood.[107]

Like the Greek sources, Vitruvius claims that the Ethiopians are cowardly because their environment has made them that way. This claim is racial because it separates Ethiopians from other groups of people by perceived innate characteristics, while the source of this physical difference is also the source for the most remarkable racial difference, skin color. Vitruvius goes on to discuss "[t]hose persons under a northern sky" and attribute characteristics to them based on their race as well.[108] In doing so, he

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[107] Vitruvius, *On Architecture* VI.4, trans. Frank Granger, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 1931.
[108] Ibid.

continues the Greek Ethiopian-versus-Scythian paradigm.[109] With all of its similarities

to the Greek precedent, this passage must be understood in the same way as those it is

based on: i.e., racist portrayals of black Africans.

Remnants of such Greco-Roman climatic racism can indeed be found as late as

the seventh century CE, when Saint Isidore of Seville wrote his *Etymologies*, otherwise

known as *Origins*:

> *Aethiopia dicta a colore populorum, quos solis vicinitas torret. Denique*
> *vim sideris prodit hominum color; est enim ibi iugis aestus; nam*
> *quidquid eius est, sub meridiano cardine est... plurimas habens gentes,*
> *diverso vultu et monstruosa specie horribiles.*

> Ethiopia is so called after the color of its inhabitants, who are scorched
> by the proximity of the sun. Indeed, the coloring of the people
> demonstrates the force of the sun, for it is always hot there, because all
> of its territory is under the South Pole… It has very many tribes,
> fearsome with their different faces and strange appearance.[110]

This passage attributes the color of Ethiopians to the sun, a tenet of climatic theory, but

stops short of ascribing other perceived characteristics of the people to the climate. In a

point relevant to this study, however, Isidore calls Ethiopians "*diverso vultu et*

monstruosa specie horribiles."[111] The above translation renders this as "fearsome with

their different faces and strange appearance," using "fearsome" for "*horribiles*" and

"strange" for "*monstruosa*." This is one possible translation, but it does not necessarily

convey the tone of the original text. According to the Oxford Latin Dictionary,

"*horribiles*" means "inspiring fear or horror, terrifying, dreadful" or "monstrous."[112]

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[109] See pages 27 and 36.
[110] Isidore, *Etymologies* XIV.5.14, trans. W. M. Lindsay for The Loeb Classical Library, 1911 as
recorded at "Isidore of Seville: The Etymologies (or Origins)." LacusCurtius – Isidore of Seville - The
Etymologies. Accessed April 20, 2018.
http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Isidore/home.html.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Oxford Latin Dictionary, *horibilis*.

Therefore, while the translation "fearsome" is technically correct, it does not carry the accurate connotation, and could be taken to mean "fearsome" in the sense of "formidable" rather than terrifyingly horrendous. Similarly, the Oxford Latin Dictionary lists "[p]ortentous, ill-omened" or "unnatural, strange, monstrous" as definitions for "*monstruosus*."[113] Translating it as "strange" does not carry the weight of "monstrous" or connect it to the previously mentioned examples of superstition as in the case of "ill-omened." Considering these alternate translations, it is clear that the above passage depicted black people quite negatively, even showing that ancient racist attitudes extended into the early medieval period.[114]

An epigram in the *Latin Anthology* showed a heightened level of racism. It came from Roman North Africa and read:

> *faex Garamantarum nostrum processit ad axem*
> *et piceo gaudet corpore verna niger,*
> *quem nisi vox hominem labris emissa sonaret,*
> *terreret visu horrida larva viros.*
> *dira, Harumeta, tuum rapiant sibi Tartara monstrum:*
> *custodem hunc Ditis debet habere domus.*

> The riff-raff of the Garamantian came up to our part of the world, and a black slave rejoices in his pitch-coloured body; a frightful spook who would scare even grown men by his appearance were it not that the sounds issuing from his lips proclaim him human. Hadrumeta, let the fearsome regions of the dead carry off for their own use this weird creature of yours. He ought to be standing guard at the home of the god of the nether world.[115]

The Garamantians were identified as black along with the slave, but to understand the full connotation of the poem, several adjustments must be made to the above translation. First, as Thompson noted, the word "*faex*," here translated as "riff-raff,"

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[113] Oxford Latin Dictionary, *monstruosus*.
[114] Their use extends beyond this period and into the modern era. See Chapter Four.
[115] *Latin Anthology* 183 in Thompson, *Romans and Blacks*, with translation by Thompson.

carried negative connotations beyond general disrepute.[116] The Oxford Latin

Dictionary suggested a translation of "scum" when applied to people and also notes the

word's association with dirt.[117] Thompson went further, and suggested the translation

"shit."[118] Both alternatives carried stronger negative connotations than "riff-raff," and

their application to black people associated the darkness of black skin with dirt or

excrement. Second, "*larva*" was translated as "spook," but the Oxford Latin Dictionary

listed "demon" or "devil" as possible translations.[119] Third, the words "*horridus*" can

be translated with connotations of "horrible" rather than just "frightful."[120] Finally,

"*monstrum*" meant something more along the lines of "monster" than "weird

creature."[121] With these modifications, it is clear that the passage denigrated the color

of black people, considered them human only in that they spoke, found them

frightening or disgusting, and associated them with the underworld.[122] The author

explicitly connected blackness with extremely negative qualities.[123] Thompson

acknowledged that the epigram "undoubtedly convey[ed] an attitude of distaste for the

Aethiops somatic appearance as well as open mockery of one or more persons of that

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[116] Thompson, *Romans and Blacks*, 36, 37.
[117] Oxford Latin Dictionary, *faex*.
[118] Thompson, *Romans and Blacks*, 36.
[119] Oxford Latin Dictionary, *larva*.
[120] Oxford Latin Dictionary, *horridus*.
[121] Oxford Latin Dictionary, *monstrum*.
[122] For other references to black people being associated with the underworld, see Snowden, "Some Greek and Roman Observations on the Ethiopian," page 31 note 69.
[123] There is another epigram that Thompson attributed to the same author (36). It read "*ex orientis die noctis processit alumnus, / sub radiis Phoebi solus habet tenebras. / Corvus carbo cinis concordant cuncta colori. / quod legeris nomen, convenit: Aethiopis.*" "From the region of the rising sun came Night's foster-son who alone keeps his blackness in broad daylight. The crow, the carbon, the cinders are completely congruent with his colour. The name by which you are called is the appropriate one – that of Blackface" (Thompson 36 with his translation). This one was not as explicitly racist as the first, but Thompson suggested that the "repetition of the Latin *c* sound throughout the third verse… may be intended to match the [fecal connotation] of the first epigram by evoking an imagery of *caca-* (excrement)… (37). Therefore, the second epigram may be read in conjunction with the first as connoting anti-black racism.

somatic type," but stopped there.[124] Instead of recognizing this poem as an example of anti-black racism, Thompson interpreted it as an expression of "a xenophobic attitude relating to a situation of armed conflict with Saharan barbarians… and reflecting a fear of marauding Saharan warriors and an associated hatred and contempt for those swarthy desert barbarians."[125] The attribution of the content of the epigram to general xenophobia produced by war denied the influence of more pervasive anti-black racism. It also contributed to Thompson's general conclusion that the negativity shown by Roman sources was a result of "upper-class 'bias' of this evidence" and that "[w]here the evidence… offer[ed] clear revelations of actual negative attitudes toward blacks… all relate[d] in some way to the fact that… blacks were usually people of humble status."[126] This position was untenable because the expressions of racism focus on blackness itself, and it is unreasonable to assume that somehow that extant body of sentiment would only be applied in some cases. Thompson's assertion is dangerously similar to the claim that modern black Americans who are above a certain level of wealth are immune to racism.

One last example will suffice to show anti-black racism as documented in Latin sources. It was from Petronius' *Satyricon* of the first century CE, in the context of a scene in which the two main characters, Encolpius and Giton, are trying to sneak onto a ship. Encolpius devised the following plan, with a subsequent response from Giton:

> *"Inspicite, quod ego inveni. Eumolpus tanquam litterarum studiosus*
> *utique atramentum habet. Hoc ergo remedio mutemus colores a capillis*
> *usque ad ungues. Ita tanquam servi Aethiopes et praesto tibi erimus sine*
> *tormentorum iniuria hilares, et permutato colore imponemus inimicis."*

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[124] Thompson, *Romans and Blacks*, 36.
[125] Ibid., 37.
[126] Ibid., 48.

"Quidni?" inquit Giton "etiam circumcide nos, ut Iudaei videamur, et pertunde aures, ut imitemur Arabes, et increta facies, ut suos Gallia cives putet: tanquam hic solus color figuram possit pervertere et non multa una oporteat consentiant <ut> omni ratione mendacium constet. Puta infectam medicamine faciem diutius durare posse; finge nec aquae asperginem imposituram aliquam corpori maculam, nec vestem atramento adhaesuram, quod frequenter etiam non accersito ferrumine infigitur: age, numquid et labra possumus tumore taeterrimo implere? Numquid et crines calamistro convertere? Numquid et frontes cicatricibus scindere? Numquid et crura in orbem pandere? Numquid et talos ad terram deducere? Numquid et barbam peregrina ratione figurare? Color arte compositus inquinat corpus, non mutat."

"Look at what I thought of. Eumolpus, as a man of learning, is sure to have some ink. Let us use this medicine to dye ourselves, hair, nails, everything. Then we will stand by you with pleasure like Aethiopian slaves, without undergoing any tortures, and our change of colour will take in our enemies."

"Oh! yes," said Giton, "and please circumcise us too so that we look like Jews, and bore our ears to imitate Arabians, and chalk our faces till Gaul takes us for her own sons; as if this colour alone could alter our shapes, and it were not needed that many things act in unison to make a good lie on all accounts. Suppose the stain of dye on the face could last for some time; imagine that never a drop of water could make any mark on our skins, nor our clothes stick to the ink, which often clings to us without the use of any cement: but, tell me, can we also make our lips swell to a hideous thickness? Or transform our hair with curling-tongs? Or plough up our foreheads with scars? Or walk bow-legged? Or bend our ankles over to the ground? Or trim our beards in a foreign cut? Artificial colours dirty one's body without altering it."[127]

This passage contains several implications. The first is the obvious disgust Giton has

for blackness. This sentiment can be determined from the tone and context of the scene

as well as the word choice. Giton's tone is incredulous and mocking. The reason for his

incredulity is his exasperation at Encolpius' idea, but the way he refers to racial and

ethnic others carries undertones of disgust. He begins his list of black physical

characteristics by citing "hideous" lips, and this word choice reflects upon the rest of

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[127] Petronius, *Satyricon* 102, trans. Michael Heseltine, W. H. D. Rouse, and E. H. Warmington, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 1913.

his catalog. One must also consider the context of the scene and how the author likely intended it to be seen. The work as a whole is a satire, and while this could lead one to believe that Petronius was actually mocking the view of black people he put into the mouth of Giton, the opposite is likely true. The comedic element of the scene does not derive from the outlandishness of Giton's characterizations of black people, but instead from the intimation from Encolpius that white people could ever be taken as black along with the grotesque nature of the image conjured up by Giton. The reader would thus be expected to agree with and revel in Giton's negative characterization of black people and derive comedy from the denigration of the racial other. This context, combined with the tone and word choice in the passage, suggests that the views expressed by Giton were the attitudes of the author and the audience as well.

The second implication of this passage is that race was more than skin color. The narrative purpose of the passage is that, as Giton says, having skin dyed with ink would not be enough to pass as black. Giton says "as if this colour alone could alter our shapes, and it were not needed that many things act in unison to make a good lie on all accounts," which clearly states that skin color was not enough to pass as black, since "[a]rtificial colours dirty one's body without altering it."[128] This comment shows that other physical traits, the ones Giton proceeds to mock, were used to identify black people. Disregarding for a moment the negative characterization of those features, the traits besides skin color isolated by Giton as essential to a black person include thick lips, curly hair, scarred foreheads, bow legs, bent ankles, and different beards. As a

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[128] Ibid.

matter of comparison, the following is a detailed physical description of a black

woman found in Virgil's *Moretum* from the first century BCE:

> *...erat unica custos,*
> *Afra genus, tota patriam testante figura,*
> *torta comam labroque tumens et fusca colore,*
> *pectore lata, iacens mammis, compressior alvo,*
> *cruribus exilis, spatiosa prodiga planta.*
>
> She was his only help, African by race, her whole appearance
> proclaiming her native land: her hair curly, her lips swollen, and her
> complexion dark; she was wide-chested, with breasts hanging low, her
> belly somewhat pinched, her legs thin, her feet broad and ample.[129]

Since "her whole appearance [was] proclaiming her native land," that meant that each

of the physical characteristics listed were seen as emblematic of black people, just like

those in the Petronius passage.[130] There is noticeable overlap here, especially when one

removes the gendered characteristics that would be unlikely to overlap, since one

passage describes a woman and one a pair of hypothetical men. Removing Virgil's

reference to breasts and Petronius' reference to beards, the remaining features fully

align: thick lips, curly hair, and some sort of difference in the legs and feet. The

inclusion of several such physical features in two Roman essentializations of black

characteristics reveals that Roman conceptions of race went beyond skin color. This is

significant because it shows how closely ancient Greco-Roman conceptions of race and

racism align with modern ones. Just as modern race theory has connected various

physical traits to blackness, so did ancient conceptions.

The evidence thus shows that the ancient Romans, like the Greeks, were racist

towards black Africans. A significant portion of the evidence comes from poetry that

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[129] Virgil, *Moretum* 31-35.
[130] Ibid.

champions white beauty and depicts the efforts of black women to lighten their skin to be accepted while also mocking that quest. Other sources attest to a fear of encountering black people for superstitious reasons, along with violence perpetrated against a black man for being in the wrong place at the wrong time. The Greek theory of climatic racism was continued, and the black body was used as a tool to inspire disgusted contempt and for comedic effect, revealing that ancient conceptions of race were alarmingly close to modern ones. All of these forms of racism should be familiar to a modern reader and they make one wonder whether there is continuity between ancient and modern racism. In addition, it makes one ask why scholarship has gone so long refusing to admit that there was racism in the ancient world. These are the questions that will be explored in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Modern Implications for Ancient Attitudes

The implications of prejudice and race in the ancient world are still relevant today. This is for two different reasons. The first is because the intellectual elite of the modern era was extensively trained in and influenced by the "Classical" world. At the same time, the newly attained "advancements" in modern racial "science" were lauded as rendering obsolete ancient precursors, while in reality drawing from the ancient theories they were intended to replace. The elite used the prejudices they found in ancient texts and in ancient societies to justify their own worldview. While classical sources were not the only factor in such modern prejudices, they were used to support, among other things, bigoted racial theories that in turn resulted in slavery and colonialism. Thus, while the classical sources that were referenced are not necessarily the same ones cited above that show anti-black racism, the sources that were used nevertheless supported modern white supremacy.

The second reason ancient discussions about prejudice and race are relevant is because there are intersecting modern narratives about racism and race in the ancient world, one scholarly and two parallel popular ones. The scholarly narrative about race in the ancient world acknowledges the presence of what a modern observer would call different racial groups, including black people, but it asserts that there was no "true" racism at the time.[131] This position is contradicted by the evidence presented in this thesis, and the continued acceptance of this outmoded perspective does a disservice to the study of the ancient world. In addition, those who constructed this narrative were

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[131] See pages 74-75.

influenced by racism of various kinds, and in their study and analysis of ancient sources at times employed or inserted racist or racial methods or content. These included methodologies or assumptions based in modern racial realities. This content would then become part of the scholarship cited to support later work that also made unsound claims about race and racism in the ancient world. Thus, modern racism, having been supported in part by ancient racism, influenced those who wrote about the ancient world such that their works included racist elements.

      The two competing popular narratives about race in the ancient world differ somewhat from the scholarly one, although all three sometimes intersect. The first, and more prevalent, narrative is that ancient Greece and Rome were white societies that formed the basis for Western civilization. As such, all the goods attributed to "Western" civilization were and to a large extent still are assumed to be the inventions and legacy of white people. This conclusion is then used as "evidence" in support of racist positions.[132] The other, competing, narrative is that ancient Greek and Roman civilization was founded on the legacy of African, particularly Egyptian, predecessors. This view posits that the great achievements that have been attributed to Greece and Rome were actually black inventions. Though ostensibly devoted to elevating black peoples' position by referencing the ancient world, this position is founded on a similar assumption that Greek and Roman civilizations were white and occasionally goes to paradoxical extremes. In these ways, both these narratives serve to perpetuate problematic beliefs.[133]

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[132] See pages 75-76.
[133] See pages 76-77.

The fact that the European and American intellectual elite of the seventeenth through twentieth centuries were well educated in and greatly influenced by the "Classics" is well established. As Caroline Winterer has noted:

> Next to Christianity, the central intellectual project in America before the late nineteenth century was classicism… From the time of the first European settlements in Virginia and Massachusetts to the era of the Civil War, reverence for ancient models helped to structure ethical, political, oratorical, artistic, and educational ideals, sometimes overtly, sometimes subtly.[134]

Generally, that reverence is discussed as manifesting itself in lofty ideas about American democracy and politics, artistic and architectural styles, and the prevalence and esteemed position of Classics departments in the educational system of the time.[135] But Classical influences were also present in darker aspects of American intellectual history. Two kinds of ancient practices that were redeployed in the modern era were the use and justifications of slavery and the doctrine of climatic racism. The first, involving ancient practices and theories about slavery, was used with and without explicit references to a specific ancient text, often Aristotle and his conception of natural slavery. The other, climatic racism - euphemistically referred to as "environmental determinism" - continued the tradition of the ancient world without attributing its history to the ancient past. The use of each shows that ancient Greco-Roman views on race continued to be applied in the modern era.

Before the American Civil War, white Americans used general references to Greek and Roman slavery that sometimes involved insertion of racial elements along

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[134] Caroline Winterer, *The Culture of Classicism: Ancient Greece and Rome in American Intellectual Life: 1780-1910*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press), 2002, 1.
[135] The designation of these departments as "Classics" also connotes the constructed reverence for antiquity.

with passages from venerated ancient works to justify slavery. The use of texts in this way appears at first to be nonsensical or inefficient: if the goal was to justify contemporary racism, why not simply refer to some of the instances cited here, in Chapters Two and Three, and argue that the esteemed ancient Greeks and Romans correctly determined blackness to be the negative modern racists agreed it was? There are several reasons why this approach was not taken. First, some of the authors cited in the chapters above were and are obscure, and would not have been part of the prized "canon" for the elite men of the early modern era. Authors like Asclepiades, Menander, Vitruvius, and Petronius were not considered the equals of authors like Cicero, Homer, and Ovid. Therefore, references to them would not have held the same appeal as those that pointed to more respected authors, assuming that the works of "lesser" authors were known or read at all. The second reason for the prevailing approach was that, although works from "respectable" authors like Ovid, Pliny, and Martial did contain racism, white early modern readers were so secure in the factuality of certain racist ideas that they sought no support for their beliefs. Passages like the ones celebrating whiteness and denigrated blackness were not cited, and may not have even been noticed, because there was no impetus to definitively prove the ideas they contained given the broad acceptance of them. On the other hand, slavery was a sufficiently difficult moral question that it required justification, which led to the focus on ancient slavery and its theories. However, as alluded to above, early modern inquiries into ancient slavery often ended up being racialized and used to support white supremacy with a particular focus on anti-blackness.

An early use of Roman attitudes about slavery combined with racial assertions was espoused by Thomas Jefferson in his *Notes on the State of Virginia* in 1785. Jefferson wrote that white and black people, whether free or slave, could never live in the same society because of, among other things, "the real distinctions [between black and white people] which nature has made…."[136] Jefferson then detailed how he considered black people to be lesser, claiming that they, among other things, were ugly, smelled bad, were reckless, were lustful without being loving, were without contemplation, lazy, "in reason much inferior" to white people, and "in imagination… dull, tasteless, and anomalous."[137] Lastly, Jefferson ranted about how the poetry of Phyllis Wheatley and the writing of Ignatius Sancho were either below mention or barely acceptable.[138] Crucially, in order to support his assertion that black people were naturally inferior, he appealed to and racialized Roman slavery. Jefferson argued that "among the Romans, about the Augustan age especially, the condition of their slaves was much more deplorable than that of the blacks on the continent of America."[139] He cites a number of Latin passages in support of this point, and then wrote, "[y]et notwithstanding these and other discouraging circumstances among the Romans, their slaves were often their rarest artists. They excelled too in science, insomuch as to be usually employed as tutors to their master's children… But they were of the race of

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[136] Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* in *Notes on the State of Virginia* ed. William Peden, 138.

[137] Ibid., 138-139. Jefferson also associates black women with orangutans, implies that slaves are too stupid to go to bed when they know they will be forced to work the next day, asserts that black people do not feel longstanding grief, and compares black people to animals. Filling out the list of racist stereotypes, he says that black people are at least somewhat musically gifted. Interestingly, he explicitly states that "Indians" are superior to black people.

[138] Ibid. Jefferson also suggests that Sancho might not have been the sole composer of his works, implying that a black person was incapable of them.

[139] Ibid., 141.

whites. It is not their [black slaves'] condition then, but nature, which has produced the distinction."[140] Here Jefferson contended that since white slaves overcame what he asserted were harsher conditions in order to achieve what he defined as greatness, the perceived failure of black slaves to do the same proved that black people were inferior. His argument, besides supporting an absurdly racist viewpoint, is flawed by false parallelisms and blinded by bias. Carl J. Richard asserts that "it is highly doubtful that Roman slavery, particularly in its later stages was harsher than American slavery."[141] By arguing this, Jefferson ignored the realities of American and Roman slavery both because of and in order to further racism. Although Jefferson cited no ancient passage explicitly referring to black people, it was true that most of the slaves in Rome were not black. Jefferson used this point to support his racist argument, while also asserting that the slavery he practiced was more humane than Roman slavery. In doing so, Jefferson used the racial reality of an ancient Roman practice to justify his own prejudices – as well as those of his contemporary white Americans.

Attitudes and approaches like Jefferson's continued to be employed in the nineteenth century. Winterer argues that Nat Turner's rebellion "caused southerners to embark on more studied defenses of slavery and to craft a regional classical identity increasingly distinct from the North's."[142] While the references were not necessarily as specific as Jefferson's, proslavery writers compared the American South to ancient slaveholding civilizations in order to justify American slavery. One of the most prolific of these writers was George Fitzhugh. In 1854, he appealed to general notions of the

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[140] Ibid., 142.
[141] Carl J. Richard, *The Founders and the Classics: Greece, Rome and the American Enlightenment*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press,) 1994, 97.
[142] Winterer, *Culture of Classicism*, 74.

ancient past to support slavery: "[t]o it (slavery) Greece and Rome, Egypt and Judea, and all the other distinguished States of antiquity, were indebted for their great prosperity and high civilization…."[143] Fitzhugh then reiterated that "this high civilization and domestic slavery did not merely co-exist, they were cause and effect."[144] Finally, he connected the ancient to the modern, as "[d]omestic slavery in the Southern States has produced the same results that it did in Greece and Rome."[145] Fitzhugh thus justified American slavery by appealing to the "Classics." In this iteration of the argument, Fitzhugh did not explicitly address race, and it was only implicit in that American slavery was racially based. However, in later works, Fitzhugh included racial references directly in the text. In *Cannibals All! Or, Slaves Without Masters* of 1857, he wrote:

> [Slavery] elevates those whites [who do not own slaves]; for it makes them not the bottom of society, as at the North… but privileged citizens, like Greek and Roman citizens, with a numerous class far beneath them. In slave society, one white man does not lord it over another; for all are equal in privilege, if not in wealth….[146]

Fitzhugh thus connected Southerners to Greeks and Romans, suggesting to contemporary readers that the South was a culture comparable in greatness to those of the ancient world that were so venerated. He also added a racial element by immediately following his comparison with the assurance that slave society makes white men equal. Together, these assertions suggested that, to Fitzhugh, Greece and Rome were examples of white civilizations to be emulated. The alignment of the South

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[143] George Fitzhugh, *Sociology for the South, or the Failure of Free Soicety*, (RichmondL A. Morris), 1851, 241.
[144] Ibid., 242.
[145] Ibid., 244.
[146] George Fitzhugh *Cannibals All! Or, Slaves Without Masters* ed. C. Vann Woodward, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press,) 1960.

with revered ancient civilizations as a means of justification for slavery permeated

Fitzhugh's works, but was not his alone. The invocation of the perceived greatness and

stability of ancient Greece or Rome was therefore used to perpetuate American anti-

black racism.

References were occasionally more specific. In one instance, a Southern author

combined a reference to Herodotus with an historical reading of the Bible to argue for

the applicability of the story of Ham and the "immutability of blackness over time."[147]

Josiah Priest sought to prove that the descendants of Ham settled Egypt, and asserted

that Herodotus "says expressly, that the Egyptians, with several nations contiguous in

the interior of Africa, were *black*, having curled or woolly hair [emphasis in

original]."[148] Priest cited the classical, and in this case an actual ancient reference to

black people, to support his theory and "prove" black inferiority.

Despite the prevalence of writers such as Fitzhugh, there were those who used

ancient Greece and Rome to argue against slavery. One such man was George Mason,

who portrayed slavery as a negative by arguing that its existence in ancient Rome was

responsible for the fall of that civilization.[149] Mason wrote that "one of the first Signs

of the Decay, & perhaps the primary Cause of the Destruction of the most flourishing

Government that ever existed [Rome] was the Introduction of great Numbers of Slaves

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[147] Winterer, *Culture of Classicism*, 75.

[148] Josiah Priest, *A Bible Defense of Slavery; or the Origin, History, and Fortunes of the Negro Race, As Deduced from History, Both Sacred and Profane, Their Natural Relations – Moral, Mental, and Physical – to the Other Races of Mankind, Compared and Illustrated – Their Future Destiny Predicted, Etc.* 1851. Archived on Internet Archive: Digital Library of Free & Borrowable Books, Movies, Music & Wayback Machine. Accessed April 20, 2018. https://archive.org/, 60.

[149] Richard, *The Founders and the Classics*, 95-96.

- an Evil very pathetically described by the Roman Historians…."[150] While it is unclear

what constituted "great Numbers" of slaves and how their presence resulted in a Gothic

invasion, Mason nevertheless evoked his perception of the ancient world to further his

argument against slavery.[151] Despite the abolitionist thrust of his argument, Mason's

reasoning also depended on racist attitudes. The slaves that he suggested were the

downfall of Rome would likely have been classified as black by his modern readers,

immersed as they were in the racial slavery of America, regardless of the racial

diversity of ancient slaves. His argument would then be read as an influx in the black

population causing the downfall of a great white civilization, which would have played

to the fears of white Americans before the Civil War. Thus, even when the argument

differed from that of Jefferson, racist attitudes were overlaid on antiquity. In the first

half of the nineteenth century, abolitionists continued to argue that slavery was the

great flaw of ancient civilizations, and that it was responsible for their downfall.[152]

In addition to general references to antiquity, Southern authors also made

appeals directly to Aristotle. Aristotle explicitly supported slavery, even theorizing that

some people were "natural slaves," and these arguments were used to support the

enslavement of black people in America. In his *Politics*, Aristotle wrote, "For that

which can foresee by the exercise of mind is by nature intended to be lord and master,

and that which can with its body give effect to such foresight is a subject, and by nature

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[150] George Mason, "Scheme for Replevying Goods and Distress for Rent." December 23, 1765. ConSource: The Constitutional Sources Project. Accessed April 20, 2018. http://consource.org/document/scheme-for-replevying-goods-and-distress-for-rent-1765-12-23/.
[151] Unfortunately, he did not follow his own advice, as he owned slaves himself and did not free them even in his will.
[152] Richard, *The Golden Age of Classics in America: Greece, Rome, and the Antebellum United States*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 2009, 193. For additional examples of abolitionist use, see Richard, *The Golden Age of the Classics* pages 193-199.

a slave…."[153] This passage not only asserts that there are natural slaves, but also suggests that they are differentiated from their masters by intellectual capacity. It is easy to see how this could merge with the sentiment expressed by Jefferson that black people were intellectually inferior. Additionally, for Aristotle, "it is better for [those who are slaves by nature] as for all inferiors that they should be under the rule of a master."[154] This remark is reminiscent of paternalistic theories of American slavery, where black people are considered intellectually and morally equivalent to children, and slavery was imagined to be a way of educating and bettering them. Finally, Aristotle connected the state of natural slavery with "barbarians" when he wrote, "[barbarians] are a community of slaves, male and female."[155] These arguments were seized by Southerners and applied to justify slavery in their own society. For example, in 1838, someone writing under the pseudonym "A Southron" wrote in the *Southern Literary Messenger*:

> Aristotle has expressly declared, that 'in the *natural state of man*, from the origin of things, a portion of the human family must *command*, and the remainder *obey*; that the distinction which exists between *master* and *servant* is a distinction at once *natural* and *indispensable*; and that when we find existing among men *freemen* and *slaves*, it is not *man*, but *nature* herself, who has ordained the distinction' [emphasis in original].[156]

This passage directly cites Aristotle and uses his authority to argue that slavery is just and natural. In doing so, authors such as the "Southron" once again grounded

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[153] Aristotle, *Politics* 1.2 1252a32-34 in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon, (New York: Random House), 1941.
[154] Ibid., 1.5 1254b18-19.
[155] Ibid., 1.2 1252b6-7.
[156] William J. Grayson as "A Southron," "Thoughts on Slavery," *Southern Literary Messenger* vol. IV no. XII, 737-747, December, 1838. Digitized by The University of Michigan "Making of America Journal Articles." Accessed April 20, 2018.
http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/moajrnl/acf2679.0004.012/751.738.

justifications for their racism in "Classical" thought. At times, this basic argument was

expanded with reference to Aristotle's views of barbarians. William J. Grayson wrote

in 1860 that:

> The maxim of Mr. Calhoun is, that a democratic government cannot
> exist unless the laboring class be slaves; that if the man who has nothing
> is allowed to rule, there can be no safety for property – property would
> soon be voted robbery. A democracy, therefore, must consist of freemen
> and slaves. This is the substance of the dogma. It is not a new thing, but
> is two thousand years old. So far from being "first enumerated" by Mr.
> Calhoun, it is as ancient as Aristotle. In his "Politics" – which should be
> a textbook in all Southern colleges – in words as clear and emphatic as
> language can furnish, he lays down the maxim, that a complete
> household or community is one composed of freemen and slaves. He
> was writing to democracies. He maintains also, that the slaves should be
> barbarians, not
> Greeks, as Mr. Calhoun now holds it to be an advantage that the slaves
> of the South are negroes, a barbarian race sufficiently strong and docile
> for labor. The whole proposition, both as to slavery itself and the race of
> the slave, is distinctly stated by the Greek philosopher.[157]

Here, Grayson argues that slavery is the foundation for democracy and supports John

C. Calhoun's articulation of this view with the authority of Aristotle. Importantly,

Grayson adds that Aristotle's view of barbarians as slaves supports black slavery in

particular because "negroes" are a "barbarian race."[158] This extension of a commonly

deployed argument thus "updated" Aristotle's views to apply to black people and used

the base theory to legitimate American slavery and racism. Some current scholars

claim that Aristotle's distinction between Greeks and barbarians was "cultural, not

racial."[159] But such a conclusion ignores the fact that Aristotle wrote that "the natives

of Asia are intelligent and inventive, but they are wanting in spirit, and therefore they

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[157] William J. Grayson, "Mackay's Travels in America-The Dual Form of Labor," De Bow's Review, XXVIII (1860), 48-66 in Harvey Wish, "Aristotle, Plato, and the Mason-Dixon Line," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 10, no. 2 (1949): , http://www.jstor.org/stable/2707417, 259-260.
[158] Ibid.
[159] Richard, *The Golden Age of Classics in America*, 189.

are always in a state of subjugation and slavery," which suggests a racial element to his conception of slavery.[160] While this passage did not display anti-black racism in an ancient context, Grayson read Aristotle as having made a racial distinction and used that to support his own position. Appeals to Aristotle abound in Southern literature from before the Civil War, and their prevalence, along with other appeals to ancient civilizations, show how the ancient Greco-Roman world was used to justify modern racism. Even if the ancient text being quoted did not display explicit examples of anti-black racism, their use perpetuated modern racism. In the case of Aristotle, his theory of natural slavery made no mention of black people, but Southerners took what they needed from it and extrapolated the rest to support their worldview.

Another way classical racism informed modern racism was in the modern adoption of the doctrine of climatic racism. This form of racism lasted long after appeals to Aristotle and Greece and Rome as slave societies had ended. Called "environmental determinism," it was advanced, for example, in Ellen Churchill Semple's 1911 work *Influences of Geographic Environment*. She argued that the environment determined the development and outcome of people and cultures by affecting their constituent races. In the book, she references Aristotle and other ancient precedents to show the validity of her work, and though the book is too full of racist theory to cover it all here, several examples illustrate her thinking.[161] Her theories resulted in her analysis of the Philippines, where she divided the population into

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[160] Aristotle, *Politics* 7.7 1327b26-28 in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*.
[161] Aristotle is invoked to legitimate her claims about islands on 430 and 444-445, in *Influences of Geographic Environment*.

"Civilized Peoples," "Wild Peoples," and "Negrito [Peoples]."[162] Additionally, she

writes "[t]he presence of a big negro laboring class in the South, [is] itself primarily a

result of climate…."[163] For Semple, American slavery was the result of the fitness of

black people for the environmental conditions of the southern United Sates, and not the

product of centuries of vicious racism. Importantly, Semple updates the ancient version

of climatic racism, which also posited the inferiority of extremely pale Northern

Europeans, to fit her world and time. She writes,

> "[t]he northern peoples of Europe are energetic, provident, serious,
> thoughtful rather than emotional, cautious rather than impulsive. The
> southerners of the sub-tropical Mediterranean basin are easy-going,
> improvident except under pressing necessity, gay, emotional,
> imaginative, all qualities which among the negroes of the equatorial belt
> degenerate into grace racial faults."[164]

As someone descended from Northern Europeans, and steeped in a culture of Northern

European supremacy, Semple thus shifted the ideal climatic traits from the ancient

locus of the Mediterranean to the north. She correspondingly subordinated Southern

Europeans, whose traits were posited as merely improved versions of black traits. In

this way, Semple adapted ancient precedent for modern racist purposes, just as

Jefferson and others had done before her. Semple's work was a landmark primarily

because it introduced the idea of climatic determinism – a "discourse of 'climate's

moral economy'" which "underpin[ned] and provide[d] scientific justification' for

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[162] Ellen Churchill Semple, *The Influences of Geographic Environment on the Basis of Ratzel's System of Antro-Geography*. New York: Holt and Company, 1911. Archived on Internet Archive: Digital Library of Free & Borrowable Books, Movies, Music & Wayback Machine. Accessed April 20, 2018. https://archive.org/, 147. This of course raises the question of what "Negrito" means. Generally, this refers to a group of people with very dark skin and curly hair that resemble "Negro" Africans.
[163] Ibid., 619.
[164] Ibid., 620.

what became the routine practices of nineteenth-century imperialism (such as slavery)….”[165] – to the “mainstream.”[166]

Another application of this theory can be seen in the policies of the Panama Canal Zone under the administration of the United States. The United States government set up a “Sanitated Zone” that “duplicated early-twentieth-century southern urban patterns. Everything from schooling to the layout of post-office lobbies was affected by Jim Crow practices.”[167] These and other racial policies were justified by “[e]nvironmental determinism [which] rationalized a theoretical position by which Americans considered it natural that different races should be treated differently and that races could be ranked according to environmentally based biological differences.”[168] These theories meant that “[black] West Indian employees enjoyed far sparser benefits than did whites, because ‘being accustomed to the tropics and the different mode of living they do not require special quarters or a frequent change of climate, which is so necessary to the health of the more skilled employee from a temperate zone.’”[169] Additionally, “[b]ecause [white] Americans were climatically out of their element, ‘the very rules of nature force the fair-skinned man to do only skilled or supervisory work.’”[170] Thus, unequal treatment and conditions echoing those under slavery were justified with racist environmental determinism.

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[165] Joe Painter and Alex Jeffrey, *Political Geography: An Introduction to Space and Power*, (London: SAGE Publicatoins), 2009, 178.
[166] Stephen Frenkel, “Geography, Empire, and Environmental Determinism,” *Geological Review* vol. 82, no. 2 (April 1992): 143. Accessed April 20, 2018. http://www.jstor.org/stable/215428.
[167] Ibid., 147.
[168] Ibid., 149.
[169] Ibid., 149, with quote from Panama Canal Commission 28 B 233/1919.
[170] Ibid., 149, with quote from Panama Canal Commission 28 B 233/1922.

As shown above, classical texts, civilizations, and theories were used to support racist positions. However, even the scholarship of race and racism in the ancient Greco-Roman world has been influenced by and has contributed to racist or racialized interpretations of or arguments about race in the ancient world. As mentioned previously, ancient racial views and societies in general were used to legitimate modern racist views, which then influenced the work on ancient racial views in a cyclical pattern. There are two ways in which such racism has affected the modern study of ancient race. The first is the insertion of racist language in the English translations of ancient texts. The second is the application of racist theories and assumptions to ancient texts or the projection of modern racial realities onto the past. With each instance or iteration of these elements, their inclusion in the scholarship confuses and perpetuates racist assumptions in later work.

As for racism in English translations, the following are two examples of different degrees of egregiousness. One example of this is cited in Chapter Three from Lucretius' *On the Nature of Things*:

> *nam faciunt homines plerumque cupidine caeci*
> *et tribuunt ea quae non sunt his commoda vere.*
> *multimodis igitur pravas turpisque videmus*
> *esse in deliciis summoque in honore vigere….*
> *…*
> *…*
> *…*
> *nigra "melichrus" est….*
>
> For this is what men usually do then blinded with desire, and they attribute to women advantages which they really have not. Thus women that are in many ways crooked, and ugly we often see to be thought darlings and to be held in the highest honor…. The black girl is a nut-brown maid...[171]

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[171] Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things* IV.1153-1160.

This is the translation in the Loeb edition, made by W. H. D. Rouse and originally

published in 1924. The Latin word *melichrus* is what gets translated as "nut-brown

maid," but the Oxford Latin Dictionary instead lists "honey-coloured" and "the name

of a precious stone" as definitions. Applying these alternatives, it is more clear that the

poem suggests euphemizing a woman's blackness. The question then becomes how

Rouse arrived at his translation. It is possible that he was referencing a ballad contained

in Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, which was first published in

1765 with numerous reprintings afterwards. The ballad was "The Nut Browne Mayd,"

variously listed as "The Nut-Browne Maid" or even "The Not-Browne Mayd."[172] In the

ballad, a maiden declares her love for a man in the face of all suggested obstacles, and

in the end he promises to marry her. The maid from the ballad is thus portrayed as a

symbol of female devotion and chastity. If Rouse is referencing this ballad with his

translation, given the sarcasm of the line, he is implying that Lucretius thinks it would

be ridiculous for a black woman to be such a character. And while Lucretius does show

contempt for blackness in the original line, Rouse would be adding a moralistic quality

to it with his translation.[173] If Rouse is not referencing this ballad, his translation of

"maid" inserts connotations of servitude not present in the original text, possibly

because that was the status he was used to giving black people. Reference or not,

Rouse's translation modifies the original in ways that suggest racial bias, if only subtly.

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[172] Percy's Reliques - The Not-Browne Mayd. Accessed April 20, 2018.
http://www.exclassics.com/percy/perc60.htm. Given the spelling of words throughout, the version "The
Not-Browne Mayd" is probably just an old spelling of "nut," and does not mean that the maid was "not
brown."
[173] See page 44.

An instance of explicit racism in translation occurs in Maurice Platnauer's 1922 Loeb translation of Claudian's *The War Against Gildo*. A personified Africa is making a speech to Jupiter about the injustices committed against her. She says:

> Aethiopem nobis generum, Nasamona maritum
> ingerit; exterret cunabula discolor infans.

> [Gildo] thrusts upon me an Ethiopian as a son-in-law, a Berber as a husband. The hideous half-breed child affrights its cradle.[174]

Two words in the English translation are of note. The first is "half-breed," which is Platnauer's translation of *discolor*. While the Oxford Latin Dictionary entry for "*discolor*" does not indicate this use, Snowden theorizes that the word and its relative "*decolor*" were applied to black people of mixed ancestry.[175] From this perspective, the English word "half-breed" in the translation appears to be simply an outdated term for a legitimate translation. The pivotal word is "hideous," because the word and its implications were completely inserted by the translator, having no correlating word in the original text. When combined into the phrase "hideous half-breed child," Platnauer shows his racism: he ignored what was written and included his own racist opinion of black children. Both of these translations therefore show how biased racial thinking was inserted into the scholarship, even at the level of translation. This is important because these texts form the basis for understanding racism in the ancient world and in their most accessible form they have been affected by racist thinking. This is part of the cycle of modern interpretations influencing and being influenced by the ancient.

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[174] Claudian, *The War Against Gildo* I.192-193, trans. M. Platnauer in *Panegyric on Probinus and Olybrius. Against Rufinus 1 and 2. War against Gildo. Against Eutropius 1 and 2. Fescennine Verses on the Marriage of Honorius. Epithalamium of Honorius and Maria. Panegyrics on the Third and Fourth Consulships of Honorius. Panegyric on the Consulship of Manlius. On Stilicho's Consulship 1*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 1922.
[175] Snowden, "The Negro in Classical Italy," 280-281.

While not strictly an issue of translation, there is also the curious case of a passage from Cicero, which is referenced by Beardsley as part of her proof that Roman views of black people were less favorable than Greek ones. The passage is ostensibly:

Cum hoc homine an cum stipite Aethiope…

Beardsley wrote "[i]n notes it ["*Aethiope*"] is translated as 'blockhead' and the statement made that in antiquity the Ethiopians were synonymous with stupidity…."[176] The problem is that the work the line is purported to be from, Cicero's *On Old Age*, does not contain the passage in any discoverable full edition of the original text or a translation. The first reference to the line as reported by Beardsley seems to be from E. A. Andrews' 1851 *A Copious and Critical Latin-English Lexicon*. In the entry for *Aethiops*, the second definition is given as "[a] course, dull, awkward man, a blockhead" and the Cicero passage is cited as evidence. Instead of merely adding an English word in the translation phase, this passage suggests that the Latin text was modified at some point, and before being corrected was adopted as evidence. Thus, while Beardsley identifies the passage as containing negative connotations about black people, it shows not ancient racism but modern racial revisionism in a similar vein as the translation issues mentioned above.

Besides translations, modern scholarship has also applied racist theories and assumptions to ancient evidence and projected modern racial realities onto the past. These traits are shared by multiple works, especially from the early twentieth century and earlier, but even Snowden's more recent work exemplifies their use. Snowden uses antiquated language and ideas about the objectivity of race as evidence for his

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[176] Beardsley, *The Negro in Greek and Roman Civilization*, 119.

arguments. While the obsolete language can sometimes be justified given the date of some of the publications – though as late as 2001 he was referring to "mulatto" people – he combined that language with a mode of thought that is now understood to be based in racism.[177] For example, Snowden asserted that the *Moretum* poem referenced above constituted "the most complete, single anthropological portrait of a Negro in classical literature."[178] To confirm this point, he compiled a table of "Negro Traits" that laid out the features of the woman in *Moretum* beside accounts of black people by anthropologists E. A. Hooton and M. J. Herskovits, whose works allegedly detail the features of the "specialized Negro division of mankind" and the "true Negro" respectively.[179] Snowden thus relied upon modern racial "science" now long since recognized as racist pseudoscience. His appeal to Hooton and Herskovits is also questionable, due to each scholar's involvement with racial "science." Herskovits, for example, in his book, *The American Negro*, measured physical characteristics in an effort that effectively amounted to phrenology.[180] Hooton likewise endeavored to categorize every human into a race based on physical and mental characteristics, creating complex racial genealogies and becoming heavily invested in eugenics. Therefore, although Snowden invoked these theories and these men to prove a relatively small point – namely, that the woman in the *Moretum* poem was black – his use of their work reveals that Snowden also thought in terms of these racist theories.

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[177] Snowden, "Attitudes toward Blacks in the Greek and Roman World: Misinterpretations of the Evidence," in *Africa and Africans in Antiquity*, ed. Edwin M. Yamauchi, (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press), 2001, 247.

[178] Snowden, *Blacks in Antiquity*, 9. *Moretum* is discussed above on page 55.

[179] Ibid., 10.

[180] See, for example, M. J. Herskovits, *The American Negro*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 1928, 32.

Another example of this type of thinking can be seen in Snowden's analysis of art, particularly sculpture. He captions one photo of a sculpture of a head "the closely cropped hair, subnasal region, and lips suggest Negroid admixture…."[181] In conducting his analyses, Snowden performed an exercise that mirrored the physical examinations of actual human bodies used to create the theories of phrenology and the classification system of Hooton and Herskovits. For Snowden, "only the anthropologically naive or those unacquainted with black-white racial mixture in the modern world would deny the obvious Negroid admixture in many of the portraits of blacks from ancient workshops."[182] Snowden then moved another step further and used this type of artistic analysis to extrapolate the lack of "color prejudice" in the ancient world. In his references to racist pseudoscience and his application of those methods of categorization to sculptures, Snowden ultimately incorporated multiple problematic elements into his research, which subsequently contributed to his conclusion that black people were not discriminated against in antiquity. As such, modern racism at the very least informed elements of a developing scholarly argument about ancient racism. In the end, the reliance on racist pseudoscience and the presence of racism in modern translations of ancient texts in which race is dealt with together show how modern racism influenced the study of ancient racism. Furthermore, since modern racism was partly founded upon and supported by ancient racism, the legacy of ancient racism came full circle, influencing the study of ancient racism itself.

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[181] Snowden, *Blacks in Antiquity*, 92 caption of figure 68.
[182] Snowden, "Attitudes toward Blacks in the Greek and Roman World: Misinterpretations of the Evidence," in *Africa and Africans in Antiquity*, 253.

The final pieces in the legacy of ancient racial attitudes come in the form of

three narratives about race and racism in the ancient world. The first of these consists

of the establishment of a scholarly consensus, while the other two represent competing

extremes, with each extreme misrepresenting ancient racism and contributing in some

way to modern racism. The history and current state of the scholarly consensus have

been discussed in Chapter One. In short, the modern denial that racism existed in the

ancient world exists as a product of and a contributor to modern racism. By denying

the existence of ancient racism, modern scholars effectively reassure themselves that

racism was born out of a fluke in the fifteenth or sixteenth centuries and the concurrent

Atlantic Slave Trade, with no contamination of the revered subject of Classics. This

approach could very well stem from a reluctance to confront racism, especially when

found in what was thought to be a refuge from this particular problem of the modern

world. Such denial may be expected from white scholars, but is perhaps surprising to

hear from Snowden and Thompson, both black men. Snowden's case in particular is

puzzling, given that he was born in 1911 and so lived through Jim Crow and the Civil

Rights Movement, and, having seen the reality of modern racism firsthand, might have

been more able to detect it in ancient texts.[183] But the very fact of Snowden's time and

place might have contributed to his conclusion that there was no such thing as ancient

racism. Precisely because he would have known the reality of modern racism,

Snowden may have sought to prove its injustice by appealing to the Classics as a model

for a better society. It could even be that, compared to what he could have seen as a

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[183] Margalit Fox, "Frank M. Snowden Jr., 95, Historian of Blacks in Antiquity, Dies." The New York Times. February 28, 2007. Accessed April 20, 2018. https://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/28/obituaries/28snowden.html.

black man in America during the twentieth century, the racism of the ancient world was mild enough that by comparison it did not appear as racism to him. Whatever the case, other, mostly white, scholars built upon Snowden's work. In doing so, they too denied the legacy of ancient race and race theory, thereby presenting an incomplete understanding of the ancient world and its relationships and entanglements with the modern one.

This scholarly consensus in turn has existed alongside two other narratives about race in the ancient world. The first narrative presents the idea that ancient Greece and Rome were white civilizations, and that, as white civilizations, they were responsible for every great thing that subsequently existed in the world. This type of argument has its origins in the intellectual elite mentioned above, but became even more explicit under Nazism, when "[Classics was] propelled to a position of ultimate prestige within the humanities…."[184] Given the persistence of Neo-Nazism and the rise of the "Alt-Right" in the twenty-first century, this narrative has maintained and is even gaining steam. According to this narrative, the Classics are "proof of the intellectual and cultural superiority of white maleness."[185] Accordingly, those who support the narrative react negatively when the ancient world is portrayed as having any sort of racial diversity, a fact that the scholarly consensus, however misguided, has come to establish. For example, when The British Broadcasting Corporation "ran a cartoon about life in Roman Britain that contained several characters who were people of color… [t]here was… a backlash to the cartoon spearheaded by the infamous website

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[184] Donna Zuckerberg, "How to Be a Good Classicist Under a Bad Emperor." EIDOLON. November 21, 2016. Accessed April 20, 2018. https://eidolon.pub/how-to-be-a-good-classicist-under-a-bad-emperor-6b848df6e54a.
[185] Ibid.

InfoWars, with various far-right web personalities claiming that the BBC valued political correctness over accuracy."[186] Even the suggestion that there were black people in the ancient Roman world was enough to incite hate comments and threats. Similar threats followed after the classicist Sarah Bond published an article detailing the racism behind the aesthetic of sparkling white ancient marble statues.[187] These incidents encapsulate the first narrative and its stakes: to adherents of the narrative, ancient Greece and Rome were nearly, if not completely, white, and that whiteness allowed these imaginary ancient people to invent everything that was ever good in the world. Just as has happened previously, people use what they perceive to be the truth about race in the ancient world to support and justify their own racism.

The second narrative at first appears to be exactly the opposite of the blatant white supremacy detailed above. Afrocentrism, when taken to extremes, argues that the great achievements of Greece and Rome were actually stolen from black African people. Championed mostly famously by Martin Bernal in his work *Black Athena*, this narrative only ostensibly opposes white racism, and actually presents another misrepresentation of historical reality. This narrative shares a key similarity with the one directly above because both posit Greece and Rome to be white societies, even though one spins that as a positive and the other as a negative. Additionally, the extreme Afrocentrist narrative sometimes disregards chronology to make its points, as when Dr. Yosef A. A. ben-Jochannan claimed that Aristotle stole his theories from the

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[186] Donna Zuckerberg, "'Learn Some F*cking History.'" EIDOLON. October 05, 2017. Accessed April 20, 2018. https://eidolon.pub/learn-some-f-cking-history-94f9a02041d3.
[187] Sarah Bond, "Whitewashing Ancient Statues: Whiteness, Racism And Color In The Ancient World." Forbes. April 27, 2017. Accessed April 20, 2018.
https://www.forbes.com/sites/drsarahbond/2017/04/27/whitewashing-ancient-statues-whiteness-racism-and-color-in-the-ancient-world/#2b44586c75ad.

Library of Alexandria, a temporal impossibility given the accepted dates of his death and the construction of the Library.[188] This narrative is thus tinged by racism and inaccuracy. As shown above, each of the three narratives is affected by racism and in turn propagates it in what constitutes a positive feedback loop. In this way, the narratives become products of modern racism and correspondingly manifest extensions of the legacy of ancient racism.

The implications of racism in the ancient world thus affect the modern day through the intermediary of modern racism. From the preserved writings of Jefferson to hateful internet comments, people have referenced the ancient Greco-Roman world in order to legitimate and perpetuate their own anti-black racism. The only responsible way of dealing with this fact is to acknowledge it in all of its forms and actively work against it.

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[188] Mary Lefkowitz, *Not Out of Africa: How Afrocentrism Became an Excuse to Teach Myth as History*, (New York: BasicBooks), 1996, 2.

Conclusion

Anti-black racism pervaded the ancient Greco-Roman world, and its legacy continues to affect modern racial realities and discourses. The ancient evidence must be pieced together from fragments and it often derives from the subtext of literary sources. However, taken as a whole, it indicates that the societies of ancient Greece and Rome held racist beliefs and that those beliefs changed little or not at all between the two societies and over a period of hundreds of years. From the ethnography of Herodotus to the climatic racism of Isidore, anti-black racism permeated Greco-Roman society. Although the surviving evidence also suggests that these racist attitudes may not have resulted in acts of violence in the vein of modern hate crimes, it is clear that these attitudes did facilitate the characterization of black people as exotic, undesirable, disgusting, and Other. As such, the ancient examples speak to a coherent discriminatory understanding of race that parallels the modern one.

Early modern race theory, which many erroneously consider the first foundation of contemporary racism, appealed to an at once revered and yet also purposefully distorted version of Antiquity and found there a justification for slavery, imperialism, and white supremacy. The constant referencing of the "Classical" created a positive feedback loop so that, when scholarship on race in the ancient world began to be produced, its authors were so inextricably immersed in the legacy of white supremacy that they, sometimes inadvertently, perpetuated the racism that they claimed did not exist in the ancient world. While scholarship that explicitly supports anti-black racism has largely stopped, the continued denial of racism in the ancient world actually continues that same racism in an implicit form. By denying the existence of anti-black

racism in the distant past, one disconnects the ancient from its effects on the early modern, and, by extension, the contemporary. This denial leads to an incomplete picture of the foundation and history of racism, an understanding of which is necessary to its eradication. It is also indicative of what might be called the "racism avoidance reflex" so widespread in "liberal" white people, which is characterized by either the convenient misinterpretation of available evidence that racism has transpired or the complete denial of the experiences of black victims. Scholarship is far from the only or most problematic legacy of racism in discourses surrounding antiquity and Classics in particular. The fact that racist attitudes and racial realities of the ancient world have become simultaneously adopted and misunderstood by the far-right is perhaps not a surprising co-option. Instead, it represents a natural adoption, considering that the same methods have been used before, if in more depth, for the same ends. The correct counter to this trend is not the polar reversal of extreme Afrocentrism or the "objective" denial of much scholarship, but the acknowledgement that the modern evil of racism stems from and has been justified and furthered by the ancient Greco-Roman past.

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