

Race and Ethnicity in the Ancient World: Methods, Sources, and Assessments

*Initiated by Aditi Rao (Barnard College '21), and intended to be a perpetual and progressive work, this website curates a selection of books, articles, and resources that Barnard and Columbia students of the Ancient Mediterranean have found helpful answering the question: How can we conceptualize **race** in the Ancient World?*

[Race is inherently unstable. It is a composite identity not imparted on someone by innate biology but encoded through a series of political, cultural, social, geographical, and moral metamorphoses. Yet this instability has long justified the exclusion of race's critical examination, discussion, and pedagogical inclusion in the study of texts, arts, and artifacts of antiquity. The absence of scholarship on race has delimited the potential of Classics, and moreover fettered its intellectual relevance and position in the modern academy.]

[If race is not just one thing, then the methods used to approach it certainly cannot be either. The following bibliography aims to fill this gap in the discussion of race in antiquity, creating an accessible and coherent list of sources from various disciplines which seek to explicate some facet of race, racialization, and racism in the ancient world. The bibliography opens with the question, "How can we conceptualize race in the ancient world?", with each subheading providing possible answers in the form of theories, methodologies, genres, and innovations which are not necessarily Classical but speak to the matters of antiquity. The sources included were chosen for the example they provide of how one may conduct a research project regarding material as political and obscured as race, without sacrificing rigorous and tangible investigation. These sources also introduce frameworks that are innovative and compelling, and even when they do not directly address the ancient world, still provide powerful suggestions and tools for doing so. (ALR, 2020)]

Race via ETHNIC STUDIES

[The study of ethnicity has been a fashionable investigation far longer than race in Classical and ancient studies. This is in large part because it is obvious that ancient peoples had strong notions of ethnicity, marking themselves out in clusters conjoined by common descent, linguistic affiliation, religion, and simple location. That being said, the longevity of the project of ethnic explication does not preclude the growth in the area which is ever-(re)forming in response to new discoveries. The following sources are rooted in various aspects of ethnic formation, and cover materials from Greece, Rome, Egypt, and Kush. The

featured work of Jonathan Hall gives a well-wrought construction of ethnicity and is a good place to begin].

Hall, Jonathan. *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity*. Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Hall's *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity* is an excellent introduction to various methodologies useful in approaching race and ethnicity in the Hellenistic world. The text's primary utility is its inclusion of theoretical frames, with full definition relating the terms both to modern and ancient contexts. Hall views ethnicity in the ancient world as operating in an instrumental sense, which is to say that ancestral, mythological, and even genetic linkages are cultivated in a group's pursuit of political and economic power. The instrumental view, and Hall's definition of the ethnic group itself, is largely formed in chapter 2, "The nature and expression of ethnicity: an anthropological view." Hall outlines his primary stakes in the argument, which he applies in later chapters to other areas – among them archaeology and linguistics. Moreover, Hall tests his own theories of race and ethnicity in antiquity alongside those of other scholars, so the text itself provides a decent intellectual history. *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity* is a wonderful resource for anyone looking to find footing in the vast scope of ancient ethnic studies, and it leaves its reader with a robust vocabulary and theoretical foundation in approaching these arguments in primary sources. (ALR, 2020)

McCoskey, Denise. *Race: Antiquity and its Legacy (Ancients and Moderns)*. Oxford University Press, 2012.

In *Race: Antiquity and its Legacy* McCoskey provides the most salient generalist's overview to race and ethnicity in the ancient world. McCoskey's thesis is that race in antiquity is distinct from the way race comes to function after the colonial era but that ancient ideas concerning race gave way and perhaps even gave power to more modern conceptions. While this notion might seem obvious, McCoskey's text eruditely guides the reader through these ideas with accessible analogies. For example, she places the dichotomy of "Black versus white" in dialogue with the sense of "Greek versus Barbarian" in the post Persian War context. *Race: Antiquity and its Legacy*, while certainly not an anthology, provides numerous primary sources in a distilled and contextualized form, thereby granting its reader not only theory but also applicable further reading. This work is a necessary companion to any formal introduction of race and ethnicity in the ancient world. (ALR, 2020)

Brown, Peter. "Aspects of the Christianisation of the Roman World," *Tanner Lectures on Human Values*. Cambridge University, 1993.

Ethnicity is conditioned by several factors: geography, ancestry, language, and importantly, religion. The rise of Christianity from a fringe religious movement to the central dominating and binding identity of the Roman Empire was not a swift nor even a fully understood transition but one that is pertinent to any examination of ethnic mutability and mobility in antiquity. Peter Brown's lecture explains Christianisation as a multifaceted and often decentralized project, noting, "I have long suspected that accounts of the Christianisation of the Roman world are at their most misleading when they speak of that process as if it were a single entity, capable of a single comprehensive

description that, in turn, implies the possibility of a single, all-embracing explanation.” In his view, ethnic alteration was nuanced and imbalanced, yet focalized and meaningful. (ALR, 2020)

Dench, Emma. *Romulus' Asylum: Roman Identities from the Age of Alexander to the Age of Hadrian*. Oxford University Press, 2005.

The dawn of the Roman Empire brought about massive shifts in the ethnic composition of the ancient Mediterranean. With its expansion over vast tracts of the Near East, North Africa, and Europe, the formulation of a coherent “Roman” identity was a necessary, critical, and ever-tenuous project. Regulating concepts of identity in Rome, Dench argues, involved a strict and decisive imperial effort that drastically impacted epistemologies of self, empire, and citizenship. In tracing the foundation mythology of Romulus and Remus through its living history, Dench is able to analyze changing judicial, mythological, imperial, and familial notions of belonging to Rome, lending her project an impressive scope. Among the most important of Dench’s interventions is her suggestion that Roman identity was “virtual” (i.e. geographically diffuse and shifting) – a helpful framework for approaching various instances of ethnic formation in the ancient world. (ALR, 2020)

Smith, Stuart Tyson. *Wretched Kush: Ethnic Identities and Boundaries in Egypt's Nubian Empire*. Routledge, 2003.

Much emphasis is placed on Egypt’s interactions with the Greco-Roman world, but understanding the relationship between Egyptians and ethnic others during the pharaonic era provides valuable perspective. Of critical importance to any meaningful study of race in antiquity are the various kingdoms of Kush in Nubia, which often rivaled or even surpassed Egypt in power and importance. Through examining the archaeological record at the sites of Askut and Tombos, Smith is able to demonstrate the ways in which shifting power dynamics between Egypt and Nubia radically altered the way ethnicity was performed and conceived. (EM, 2021)

Race via CRITICAL RACE THEORY

[A school of thought pioneered by Black scholars in the mid 1980s, Critical Race Theory (CRT) transformed the reading of literature, history, law, and nearly every other facet of the academy by suggesting that race, especially white supremacy, permeates the fiber of the world. CRT is a framework that can be widely applied and serves to question the fundamental assumptions of the work through the complication of racial thought. Of the following sources the first serves as an introduction to the topic, the next two provide examples of how CRT can be utilized in Classical research, and the last counters CRT and suggests innovations to the framework itself.]

Omi, Michael and Winant, Howard. *Racial Formation in the United States*. Routledge Press, 1994.

Understanding race and ethnicity in the ancient world does not necessarily require experts on antiquity to give meaning, context, and important intervention to the texts and materials considered. Michael Omi and Howard Winant are sociologists concerned with America in the modern era, yet whose construction of racial formation theory is a valuable model for thinking through ancient contexts. Most importantly, Omi and Winant challenge common notions of race as fixed and codified, proposing instead an idea of race as unstable, dynamic, and adaptive to its milieu – especially in the context of political and social conflicts. This theory is laid out primarily in chapter 4, “The Theory of Racial Formation,” which helpfully defines and complicates the terms race, racialization, and racialized. *Racial Formation in the United States* stands out in the bibliography of any student of Classics or ancient studies, as it gives an insightful and timely “outsiders” take on the matters at hand. (ALR, 2020)

Hartman, Saidiya. “Venus in Two Acts”. *Small Axe*, vol. 12 no. 2, 2008, 1-14.

In her studies of “the afterlife of slavery,” Saidiya Hartman has forged new ground in interpreting Atlantic slave trade documents and in archival studies more generally. “Venus in Two Acts” is Hartman’s attempt to solve the mystery of Venus’ abundance and meaning for enslaved women in the Caribbean. Reading the diaries of Thomas Thistlewood – a cruel and perverse slavemaster who primarily wrote in Latin – Hartman demonstrates the violence of archives that serve to silence Black slaves. Aside from its overt connections to antiquity, “Venus in Two Acts” is essential reading for the student of CRT for its discussion of critical fabulation. In Hartman’s own words, “The intention [of critical fabulation] isn’t anything as miraculous as recovering the lives of the enslaved or redeeming the dead, but rather laboring to paint as full a picture of the lives of the captives as possible. This double gesture can be described as straining against the limits of the archive to write a cultural history of the captive, and, at the same time, enacting the impossibility of representing the lives of the captives precisely through the process of narration.” This tool, widely and keenly applicable to the Classical canon, which is often marked more by its silence than its voice, will enhance the theoretical approach taken by any scholar. (ALR, 2020)

Haley, Shelly. “Be Not Afraid of the Dark: Critical Race Theory and Classical Studies,” in Laura Nasrallah and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (eds.), *Prejudice and Christian Beginnings: Investigating Race, Gender and Ethnicity in Early Christian Studies*. Fortress Press, 2009.

Haley, a Black woman and scholar of Latin poetry, masterfully explores how the two often isolated fields of Classics and Critical Race Studies can be meaningfully and revealingly placed into dialogue. Moving through some of the best known Latin works – among them selections from Catullus and Vergil – Haley puts her own translations alongside well known alternatives in order to demonstrate the power of taking a common Latin adjective instead as a racial descriptor. This work is especially useful to readers of Latin, for whom the text demonstrates how race and racial thought are encoded in poems that are often taken as race-neutral. (ALR, 2020)

Hendricks, Margo. “Coloring the Past, Rewriting Our Future: RaceB4Race.” Speech at Race and Periodization conference at the Folger Institute, 2019.

Speaking at a panel on Race and Periodization, literary theorist Margo Hendricks called for the abandonment of Premodern Race Studies – something she sees regularly and unproductively performed in academic settings – in favor of Premodern *Critical* Race Studies. The impact of the word “critical” here adds an important valence, one that pushes against the white academic seizure of Premodern Race Studies. Premodern Critical Race Studies, Hendricks notes, “actively pursues not only the study of race in the premodern, not only the way in which periods helped to define, demarcate, tear apart, and bring together the study of race in the premodern era, but the way that outcome, the way those studies can affect a transformation of the academy and its relationship to our world. [Premodern Critical Race Studies] is about being a public humanist. It’s about being an activist.” Clearly, the field of Critical Race and antiquity is still actively forming. Listening to the scholars who are currently pushing the boundaries of conceptualizing race in antiquity and reshaping these limits is vital. (ALR, 2020)

Race via AFROCENTRISM

[Afrocentrism is a movement in the humanities to focalize – rather than view as an object, responder, or colonized subject – the African continent. Its implications for ancient studies have been brewing since Martin Bernal published his extremely influential and controversial book *Black Athena* in the 1980s. In Classics and Ancient Studies, Afrocentrism has primarily been utilized as a lens for exploring Egypt’s importance in antiquity, but non-Egyptian Africa requires equal examination and elevation. The following sources explore methods and case studies of Afrocentrism that examine Egypt, Pan Africanism, and Ethiopia.]

Snowden, Frank. *Blacks in Antiquity*. Harvard University Press, 1970.

In his far-reaching project, Frank Snowden, renowned professor of Classics at Howard University, presents a history of Blackness in the ancient world through a transdisciplinary examination of “Ethiopians.” Ethiopian, as Snowden demonstrates, became in the Greco-Roman world a catchall term for Black-skinned individuals. Obvious divisions existed among those in this racial category, and Snowden demonstrates the rich and varied nature of the surviving evidence. Using archeological, legislative, and literary sources from both Greek and Roman civilizations, Snowden foregrounds and illuminates the heterogeneous experiences of Africans in contexts of culture contact. In doing so, he problematizes the notion that modern biases can be easily transposed upon the peoples of the ancient world. This is an excellent text for those seeking visual and material sources regarding race in antiquity. (ALR, 2020)

Bernal, Martin. *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*. Rutgers University Press, 1987.

Updated as of 08/01/2021

Presented in three equally decisive volumes, the first published in 1987, Bernal's *Black Athena* is perhaps the most controversial work in the modern discipline of Classics. Bernal, the grandson of one of the twentieth century's most famous Egyptologists, was a scholar of ancient China by training. As a result of studying Semitic languages and cultures, Bernal found new interest in what he saw to be the Afroasiatic roots of Greek civilization. In essence, Bernal asserts that cultural, linguistic, and religious similarities demonstrate that Greek civilization took its lineage from Egyptian civilization, making Classical civilization ultimately of African heritage. Importantly, Bernal considers this taking of lineage as intentional theft, rather than as simple cultural exchange. Although the evidence he mobilizes has been frequently contested, *Black Athena* is important in that it explores the various ways in which Classics as a discipline has been invested in closely guarding the purity of its European roots. Bernal's text – which won the American Book Award – generated widespread debate in the field of Classics, but its reception in Black studies and other areas has been largely positive and productive. (ALR, 2020)

Further reading on *Black Athena* and its tumultuous reception can be found in **Denise McCoskey's** article in *Eidolon*, "[Black Athena, White Power.](#)" See also Mary Lefkowitz's hearty rebuke of Bernal in her book, *Not Out Of Africa: How "Afrocentrism" Became An Excuse To Teach Myth As History*, to which Bernal responded in his 1987 work, *Black Athena Writes Back*.

Cheikh Anta Diop. *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth Or Reality*. Lawrence Hill Books, 1974.

Cheikh Anta Diop, born in Francophone Senegal, wrote numerous histories that offered a cohesive account of Africa's ancient past. His most frequent focus was on ancient Egypt. Diop believed that racial-ethnic terminology such as "Mediterranean," "Middle-Eastern," and even "Caucasian" served to dissociate Egypt from its African identity and tradition. Importantly, Diop wanted the term "black," in academic literature and common vernacular, to have as broad a meaning as the term "white," leading him to write numerous histories on Egypt that focused on the Blackness of the population. Like Bernal, Diop is a controversial figure in the academy. His view that Egypt should be viewed as a thoroughly African civilization, however, is important. (ALR, 2020)

Race via GEOGRAPHY & ENVIRONMENTAL THEORY

[A thought that often emerges in approaching race in the ancient world is that race might not have existed but homeland based discrimination did. The reason for this is that the barbarian – that uncivilized, hated being – was by definition a person born in the non-Greek world. These two articles attempt to explain how geographies and historiographies that detail space contribute to a salient construction of the foreigner and the qualities which they embody.]

Calame, Claude. “Uttering Human Nature by Constructing the Inhabited World: The Well-Tempered Racism of Hippocrates,” in *Masks of Authority: Fiction and Pragmatics in Ancient Greek Poetics*, 135-156. Cornell University Press, 2005.

The Hippocratic Corpus offers insight into ancient notions of race and ethnicity by virtue of its expansive categorization of various geographically disparate groups. While not all produced by Hippocrates, the Corpus is bound by a common notion of environmental determinism, asserting that the specific characteristics, temperaments, and physicalities of a population are largely due to the location from which they hail. Calame, in this chapter from his book *Masks of Authority*, explores the pseudoscientific racism that underlies Hippocrates’ project as well as more modern adoptions of the Hippocratic ethic. Serving as a thorough introduction to many aspects of Hippocrates and his legacy, Calame should be read by those who hope to glean more insight to geography as the foundational constructor of racialized hierarchies. (ALR, 2020)

Clarke, Catherine. “An Island Nation: Re-reading Tacitus’ ‘Agricola.’” *The Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol. 91, 2001: 94-112.

Mono-chromatic differentiation, that is racial and ethnic demarcations which exist between groups of the same skin-color, contributes to a substantial portion of all racialized encounters in the ancient world. One group through which to meaningfully examine this phenomenon are the Celts, the inhabitants of the British Isles during the 1st century AD, who were conquered under the Roman general Agricola. Katherine Clarke’s close reading of Tacitus’ *Agricola* Constitutes an important intervention in environmental studies, as she demonstrates how Britain’s geographic otherness and isolation made it, for Tacitus and his countrymen, a natural and elusive foe. Clarke’s work is bolstered by a vast array of ancient sources and makes valuable contributions to island theory – the examination of how islands manifest in human history and imagination. (ALR, 2020)

Race via LITERARY & PERFORMANCE TRADITIONS

[Embrace of racial conversation in scholarship likely happened first not in the pages of some journal but on the Classical stage, which since medieval times has had to confront the racialized implications of various dramas and texts. Moreover, artists across the world have long used Greco-Roman literature to reimagine and complicate their own existences. The many sources in this category will lead you towards several digitized performances of ancient plays as well as their modern reimaginings. Some are tragedies that were directed and set in the Global South, while others were performed with a racial subtext in the West. All lend tools to read, and read critically, texts produced in antiquity.]

***Oedipus El Ray, Electricidad, & Mojada* by Luis Alfaro**

Luis Alfaro, a Chicano playwright from East Los Angeles, first adapted Greek Tragedy set to the tune of Latinx struggle with his *Electricidad*, a 2003 rendition of Sophocles’ *Electra* about vengeance

and paternal piety in the Cholo Gang. In 2010 he followed the Sophoclean trend directing *Oedipus El Ray*, a play about prison gangs, and in 2015 Alfaro put out *Mojada* – a take on *Medea* about an undocumented mother traversing the Mexican-American border with her children. Alfaro's Chicano Greek trilogy is a harsh reenvisioning of the originals, putting pressure on the theme of exile to consider incarceration and on the theme of familial duty to consider gangs. All three plays can be found for free through the [Center Theatre Group](#) and additionally have regular runs in New York City theaters. (ALR, 2020)

***Antigone in Ferguson* by Bryan Doerries & the Theatre of War Productions**

On August 9, 2014, Michael Brown's body lay exposed on the streets of Ferguson, Missouri for hours after his murder. The gathering crowd, aware that a white police officer had shot the young Black man in the back, several times over, set up a candlelight vigil as they witnessed the state-sanctioned effort to cover up and justify his homicide. The Greek stage provided the (male) citizens of Athens a space to witness great performances of violence and process these communally. Some echoes of that ancient tradition were reborn in 2016 when, in the auditorium of Normandy High School, from which Michael Brown had graduated just 8 days prior to his death, Theatre of War productions staged *Antigone in Ferguson*. The play diverges little from the plot and dialogue of Antigone, but in the context of the shameful exposure of Brown's body and the fissure this political decision caused in the city of Ferguson, the Sophoclean tragedy took on entirely new meaning. Accompanied with a gospel choir composed of members of the Ferguson community, the production is an ambitious and moving project of healing through art and community. The play is performed frequently, for free, across the United States, and online recordings can be accessed through the [Theatre of War's website](#). (ALR, 2020)

Dos Santos, José de Paiva. "The Darkening of Medea: Geographies of Race, (Dis)Placement, and Identity in Agostinho Olavo's *Além do Rio*" in *The Oxford Handbook of Greek Drama in the Americas*, eds. Kathryn Boshier, Fiona Macintosh, et al. Oxford University Press, 2015.

Agostinho Olavo's *Além do Rio (Medea)* premiered on stage in Rio, 1961, leaving unfortunately little record of its original production. Its legacy, upon which dos Santos builds his argument, however, is resonant in Brazilian theatrical traditions. Olavo's *Medea* was potentially as transgressive to the norms of 1960s Brazil as the original Euripides was to his own Athenian audience, with Olavo adapting the story to reflect the legacy of African slave trade in Brazil and the social conflicts brought on by the presence of blackness in the nation. Olavo's rendition is acutely critical of the nation state, and Brazil's purported "racial democracy," which in the 20th century was used to describe an unrealistic but supposedly realized state of absolute social mobility and racial equality. *Além do Rio* is complex and requires reading on 1960s Brazil to appreciate more fully, but it is nonetheless foundational to South American Classical receptions and performance traditions. (ALR, 2020)

For more information on Olavo's *Além do Rio*, readers should consult **Maria Cecilia de Miranda's Five Medea's in Brazil in the *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies***, which places Olavo in important context with other Brazilian receptions of Medea, as well as introducing rare photographs of these performances. In addition, readers more broadly interested in Brazilian adaptations of Greek tragedy should reference the work of Jorge Andre, who is extensively covered in the [Latin American Theatre Review](#).

Hall, Edith. "Aeschylus' Persians via the Ottoman Empire to Saddam Hussein" in *Cultural Responses to the Persian Wars: Antiquity to the Third Millennium*, eds. Emma Bridges, Edith Hall, and P. J. Rhodes, 164-193. Oxford University Press, 2007.

Since Edith Hall's publication of *Inventing the Barbarian* in 1989, the idea that Panhellenic Greek identity was forged in response to the Greco-Persian War(s) has been well-trodden. Regardless of the extent to which Hall's hypothesis is accepted, there is surely truth that engagement with the Persians forced Greek consideration of self-definition, an undertaking that required political and literary pressure. Aeschylus' *The Persians* was performed first in 472 BC, soon after the end of the decade long battle which ended in Achaemenid defeat. Since then, the play – which depicts the demise of hubristic Xerxes, attended by his widowed mother and ghost father – has been emblematic of the violence between "The West" and "The East." Hall's chapter in her collection *Cultural Responses to the Persian Wars: Antiquity to the Third Millennium*, traces the production history of *The Persians*, with focus given to those productions of it that followed the Gulf War and American intervention in the Middle East, and well as performances which happened outside of the western hemisphere. Hall's work is a great example of how to track various forms of a production through different eras, regions, and contexts, and synthesizes around the notion that an inherent hatred for the East is produced by and contained in *The Persians*. (ALR, 2020)

Lecznar, Adam. "The Tragedy of Aimé Césaire" in *Classicisms in the Black Atlantic*, eds. I. Moyer, A. Lecznar, and H. Morse (Oxford Scholarship Online, 2020), 197-222.

Diaspora is an important lens through which to examine receptions and structures of Classicism. *Classicisms in the Black Atlantic*, which has several other chapters featured in this bibliography, is a collection that examines the productions of one particular diaspora, the Black Caribbean, and explores Classical reverberations in slave tradings, rebellions, and settlements in the New World. Adam Lecznar's examination of Martinican author Aimé Césaire's corpus uses the Classical philology of Nietzsche to reconsider certain structures within Césaire. Lecznar can be a little difficult to follow if you're not fully familiar with theories of tragedy, tragic performance, and its reception, but his reading of Césaire is a valuable examination of race through literary reception. Moreover, Lecznar's examination of the Nietzschean tension within the work of Césaire brings various regions of reception to heads with each other. (ALR, 2020)

Cohen, Jeffery Jerome. "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)" in *Monster Theory*. University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

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Cohen's monumental text of literary theory lends a new *modus legendi*, or method of reading. The seven theses as stated are: The Monster's Body is a Cultural Body, The Monster Always Escapes, The Monster is a Harbinger of a Category Crisis, The Monster Dwells at the Gates of Difference, The Monster Polices the Borders of the Possible, Fear of the Monster is Really a Kind of Desire, and The Monster Stands at the Threshold of Becoming. These theses intermesh with ancient notions of race in nuanced and delicate ways but make a profound impact on how to come to terms with monsters in antiquity. While Cohen's theories are not grounded in antiquity, their resonance is felt when reconciling the significant othering which happens upon the bodies of the satyrs and the harpies. *Monster Culture* offers a well-wrought theoretical lens that should prove useful to a student approaching monsters in antiquity. (ALR, 2020)

Ndiaye, Noémie, “‘Everyone Breeds in His Own Image’: Staging the Aethiopica across the Channel” in *Renaissance Drama*, 2016.

The *Aethiopica* of Heliodorus, likely written in the 3rd century AD, tells the story of a Nubian King and Queen who produce a white-skinned daughter. Her mother, fearing the stigma of the child's skin color, entrusts her to commoners, and she is raised without knowledge of her royal ancestry or heritage. The antics which follow make *Aethiopica* a phenomenally fun read, as well a rich resource for discussions of race in antiquity. Incidentally, the text was repeatedly rediscovered, gaining new resonance in each context. Ndiaye Noémie, a scholar of identity formation through literature in the early modern era, explores the transmission of *Aethiopica* in France and the impact its stagings had on British theatre in the 17th century. Performing an ancient work whose stance on racial supremacy is obscure in a context where race and colonial expansion into Africa is a central motivating force imbued new meaning to the text and its reception. (ALR, 2020)

Race via RECEPTION

[Reception is marked by the removal of a Classical text from its original context, so that it might be placed into dialogue with theories, texts, arts, and historical events from altered eras and regions. Some directors simply wish to make Classical texts more accessible to their audience, while others set out explicitly to initiate a cultural dialogue. The wide array of sources in this section will lead the reader to various receptions – cultural, literary, political, and artistic – and illustrate the multifaceted approach and form that reception as a method can take. Importantly, reception can be performed on other receptions, making these projects manifold, recursive, and generative.]

Morrison, Toni. “Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature” from *The Tanner Lectures on Human Value*, University of Michigan, 1988.

The first paragraph alone of Toni Morrison's 1988 Tanner Lecture on Human Values is enough to exercise one's brain and suspend typical expectations of language. Morrison, most broadly, seeks to

locate African-Americanness in a canon it has long been present, yet unacknowledged, in. A student of Greek at Howard, Morrison's works are imbued with resonances of – and clear departures from – ancient mythology. Morrison is especially interested in how canons are constructed and in the processes of legitimation, inclusion, and flattening. As she puts it, “The subliminal, the underground life of a novel, is the area most likely to link arms with the reader and facilitate making it one’s own.” Morrison provides an excellent entry to Classical reception, as she frequently mentions both Classical works and the scholars who unpack them (Bernal makes an important appearance). Yet she also moves beyond what the Classical canon is to discuss what it has become and, powerfully, what it *can* mean. (ALR, 2020)

For more information on the Classical threads woven within Morrison’s works, see Justine McConnell’s **Postcolonial *Sparagmos*: Toni Morrison’s *Sula* and Wole Soyinka’s *The Bacchae of Euripides: A Communion Rite***, which also draws attention to Soyinka’s translation of the *Bacchae* (undertaken while he was political refugee in London). Tessa Royon’s “**The Africanness of Classicism in the Work of Toni Morrison**” published in *African Athena: New Agendas*, also explores the entanglements and tensions between Morrison and the Classics.

Green, Toby. “Beyond Culture Wars: Reconnecting African and Jewish Diasporas in the Past and the Present,” in eds. Gurminder K. Bhambra et al *African Athena: New Agendas*, 138-155. Oxford University Press, 2011.

Green states that Bernal’s intentions in *Black Athena* to bring Jewish and African histories closer together – through positing an Afro-Asiaticism that underlies western civilization – ultimately fails. Using a framework of hybridity, however, Green offers a reading of Bernal that generates commonality between Jewish and African communities rather than discord. More than anything, Green is writing a piece of reception on one aspect of Bernal’s far stretching argument, namely that the unyielding divisions between Jewish and African communities can be traced through certain historical arcs to the Atlantic Slave Trade. (ALR, 2020)

Moyer, Ian, Adam Lecznar, and Heidi Morse, eds. *Classicisms in the Black Atlantic*. Oxford University Press, 2020.

The Black Atlantic is a region marked out for its antiquity and for its trauma. Millions were dragged through its waters. These individuals would lose their families, homes, and freedoms only to become the foundation of the New World and all that would be built upon it. *Classicisms in the Black Atlantic* receives and responds to various traditions – literary, intellectual, philosophical – that emerged from the region, and it considers these in light of the Classical canon. The chapters within this edited volume are uniformly profound and interesting. For the purpose of this bibliography, three are highlighted below. (ALR, 2020)

- **Greenwood, Emily. “Middle Passages: Mediating Classics and Radical Philology in Marlene NourbeSe Philip and Derek Walcott,”** 30-56.

The Middle Passage was the leg of the triangular trade wherein African slaves were moved to plantations in America, usually carried on European boats. Emily Greenwood selects two representations of the voyage – Walcott’s *Omeros* and NourbeSe Philip’s *Zong!* – and uses them as points of mediation: first as “classical myths and/or texts that serve to mediate and disseminate Black Atlantic experience,” and second as “tempering or reconciling received ideas of classical texts.” Unlayering the Greco-Roman epic tradition, which pervades the motivations and aesthetics within both works, Greenwood demonstrates how both Walcott and NourbeSe Philip mobilize Latin in a production of reorienting and dismembering structures of power.

- **Donkor, Kimathi. “Africana Andromeda: Contemporary Painting and the Classical Black Figure,” 163-194.**

An artist whose primary medium is painting, Kimanathi Donkor examines representations of Andromeda – an Ethiopian princess, who was sentenced to be sacrificed to a sea monster as punishment for her mother’s hubristic vanity. Andromeda is eventually rescued by the hero Perseus. Donkor writes in an interesting and accessible fashion of his attempts while at the Tate Modern to discern Andromeda’s placement in the canon of Classical and classically influenced artwork. Specifically, he is concerned with the racial politics of her portrayal as Black or White. The piece is a wonderful exploration of a non-textual archive through the eyes of an artist.

- **Rankine, Patrice. “Classics for All?: Liberal Education and the Matter of Black Lives,” 267-289.**

Concluding the work as a whole, Rankine’s examination of issues of access and delimitation of thought in the post-Obama era lends itself to an important discussion of the point of Classics itself. Rankine notes that Classics for All, a campaign to give universal access to Greek and Latin language learning for school children, is problematized by “[its] idea of unidirectional mastery, namely that the recipients benefit from the discipline and leave it as pristine as they found it.” Rankine draws a meaningful analogy between the loss of particularity in approaching Classics and the Neoliberal flattening of the Black Lives Matter movement.

Murray, Jackie. “W.E.B. Du Bois’ *The Quest of the Silver Fleece*: The Education of Black Medea,” in *Transactions of the American Philological Association Supplement*, vol. 149, issue 2, 143-162: 2019.

Through the examination of a single Du Bois novel, *The Quest of the Silver Fleece*, Jackie Murray attempts to demonstrate a Classically informed and compelled character using biographical analysis and literary examination. Murray uses *The Quest of the Silver Fleece* to meditate on Du Bois’ beliefs on higher education and political representation, especially through the myth of Medea and Jason. The text is well paired with Rankine’s “Classics for All” chapter, as both discuss Black access to Classical pedagogies and the motivations behind this education. Moreover, Murray receives not only Du Bois’

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the *Souls of Black Folks* but also the *Argonautica* of Apollonius. The cooperative reading lends new meaning to both texts and binds them to a larger conversation about the Classical education of Black America. (ALR, 2020)

Vasunia, Phiroze. *The Classics and Colonial India*. Oxford University Press, 2013.

The Classics in Colonial India were received first by the British colonizers, who were interested in conceptualizing their new domain and the people indigenous to it through the frames of history and myth most motivating to their imperial ideology. Shortly thereafter, however, it would be the colonized Indians who used Classics both to understand the conditions and mechanisms of their colonization and to imagine a future that lay beyond it. These various receptions are central to Vasunia's project, which considers representations of figures as central as Alexander (Sikhander) the Great and Gandhi. Vasunia's use of both English and Indian archives, as well as his own familiarity with vernacular Indian traditions allows him access to intellectual traditions and sources not previously considered in the realm of Classics. (ALR, 2020)

Race via TECHNOLOGY

[Reconstructing race is not just the project of the humanities but one driven by advancements in the available technology. From video games to the voice of mummies, modern technology has enabled us to not just discern race through texts and artifacts but through methodologies and methods unavailable to previous generations of scholars. The following sources present a sampling of technological projects and also the ethical issues we will contend with in their wake.]

“Gods in Color: Polychromy in Antiquity.” Digitized Exhibit by the Liebieghaus Sculpture Museum, Frankfurt: 2017.

This remarkable online museum resource introduces individuals to the complexity of color and curation, unraveling the story of “white marble,” which historically was not at all white, but rather vividly bright. The curatorial staff at Liebieghaus are among a small but dedicated group of scholars attempting to reconstruct the original coloration of statues from the Greco-Roman world, which were purposefully white-washed for centuries in order to propagate a false notion of aesthetic purity. The Digital exhibit gives dozens of reconstructions, that serve to correct the incorrect belief that the Greeks and Romans fetishized white skin as beautiful and virtuous. Via their project, and by drawing attention to others of a similar vein, the Liebieghaus team argue persuasively that while the whitening of statues has usurped ancient conceptions of beauty, race, and self, technological advancements in restoration allow for a reversal of such usurpation. (ALR, 2020)

Nerlich, Andreas. “The infant mummy’s face – Paleo Radiological investigation and comparison between facial reconstruction and mummy portrait of a Roman-period Egyptian child” in Public Library of Science, 2020.

Forensic reconstruction in the past few years has largely focused its attention, rightly or wrongly, on Egypt. Perhaps this is due to the prevalence of physical remains or to questions regarding Egypt’s ethnic makeup in the Greco-Roman period, but through various projects we now have faces, races and even [voices](#) of ancient Egyptians. For example, a team at the Institute of Pathology in München, Germany led by Andreas Nerlich, used CT technology to examine the body of a young child and to create a facial reconstruction. That reconstruction was then compared with the funerary portrait incorporated into its mummy wrappings. The portrait was found to be reasonably accurate, although the child was presented as if slightly older than he turned out to be. (ALR, 2020)

The ethical considerations that attend to such reconstructions are as valuable to consider as the reconstructions themselves. Jasmine Day’s **“Thinking Makes it So: Reflections on the Ethics of Displaying Egyptian Mummies”** and Gareth Jones and Maja Whitaker’s **“The Contested Realm of Displaying Dead Bodies”** are two examples of such ethically-minded meditations. For more specific readings on reconstructional debates, Kenneth C. Nystrom’s **“History of Bioarchaeology and Mummy Studies”** and Bettina Lonfat and Ina Kaufman’s **“A Code of Ethics for Evidence-Based Research With Ancient Human Remains”** lend important insight.

Hammar, Emil. “Counter-hegemonic commemorative play: marginalized pasts and the politics of memory in the digital game Assassin’s Creed: Freedom Cry.” *Rethinking History*, Vol 21, 2017: 372-395.

When approaching the issue of race in the ancient world, it is difficult to avoid preconceived notions of how these people looked, acted, and moved through their worlds. Often these logics are informed by the depictions of ancient people and places in popular media. Video games are integral to the formation of this imagination, with one notable example being Assassin’s Creed. Depicting events from Ptolemaic Egypt and the Peloponnesian War, Assassin’s Creed invites players to partake in fundamental moments in world history. In his in-depth examination of Assassin’s Creed’s representational hierarchies, Hammar explores how the game presents “real” and “authentic” visualisations that are intentionally uncomplicated – thereby undermining historical trauma. Hammar argues that video games serve as procedural and performative methods of memory-making and thus should approach their historical subjects with more nuance and care. (ALR, 2020)