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## **The (Mis-) Use of Greco-Roman History by Modern White Supremacy Groups: The Implications of the Classics in the Hands of White Supremacists**

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### **Abstract:**

Extensive research was conducted to address the historical significance of the use of Greco-Roman history by modern white supremacists' in the United States. I found that the use of the Classics by hate groups, such as white supremacy groups, follows a pattern of behavior beginning with the development of race theories between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. I examined the writings of race theorists from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries to prove how they used the work of Tacitus, for example, to coin both this idea of "white racial superiority" and project their own view of race onto the past. It is imperative to understand that our modern views of race did not exist in antiquity. Instead, the ancient Greco-Romans credited the physical differences amongst groups of people as a result of their geolocation, i.e. climate. I found this truth after poring over the ancient Greco-Roman texts that proved their idea of environmental determinism. Furthermore, I traced the implementation of this incorrect classical reception in the history of the United States, specifically in the legislation and education system in the nineteenth century onwards. By doing so, I was able to clearly see where modern white supremacists collected their skewed view of history from and how they continue to propagate false realities of antiquity. I argue that the Trump administration created an atmosphere where white supremacy groups feel entitled to outwardly demonstrate and incite acts of violence. I proposed my view that classicists have a duty to disseminate the truth from fiction and educate society as a whole during this time of rampant fake news.

**Keywords:** History, white supremacy, classical reception, Greco-Roman antiquity, race theory, nineteenth century, western civilization

## Introduction

The reception of the classical world in the modern period is a flood the media outlets in 2019. The spike in the coverage is due to the growing presence of white supremacist groups in the United States and abroad. White supremacists aim to preserve a white racial hegemony in response to changing demographics that they view as unrecognizable. The U.S. Census Bureau projects that white people will no longer be a majority by 2044 and this has incited fear and hate into the minds of white supremacists.<sup>1</sup> Today's changing societal landscape incites fear and rage into the hearts and minds of white supremacists. As a result, these groups gain a more public presence in society via demonstrations and even acts of violence. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, there has been a recorded rise in the number of hate groups across the United States since 2015. In August of 2017, the white supremacists' discontent was brought into the global spotlight in Charlottesville, Virginia. The Unite the Right Rally served as the climactic event during what has been dubbed "The Summer of Hate," a term coined by Neo-Nazi Andrew Langlin.<sup>2</sup>

The Southern Poverty Law Center credits this spike in part to the Trump administration's open support of violence and use of fear mongering as a means to garner support. Since the Trump administration's presidential campaign in 2016, there have been innumerable instances of President Trump's indirect and direct support to white supremacy groups. This is perhaps most evident in the Trump administration's

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<sup>1</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center, "White supremacy flourishes amid fears of immigration and nation's shifting demographics," *The Year in Hate: Rage Against Change*, accessed May 3, 2019, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2019/year-hate-rage-against-change>.

<sup>2</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center, "'Summer of Hate' challenged in companion civil lawsuits," *Hatewatch*, accessed May 3, 2019, <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2017/10/19/summer-hate-challenged-companion-civil-lawsuits>.

position towards immigration. For example, in January of 2018, Trump revealed his anti-immigration attitude towards Haitians and immigrants from Africa during talks of creating a bipartisan immigration deal.<sup>3</sup> The Associated Press reported that President Trump stated; "Haiti? Why do we want people from Haiti here?" [In regards to Africa]. 'Why do we want these people from all these shithole countries here? We should have more people from places like Norway.'<sup>4</sup> The key distinction here is that President Trump shows favoritism towards white immigration compared to people of color.

However, this is not the first incidence of misappropriation of the Greek and Roman worlds. For example, during the construction of the concept of biological race theory in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, European theorists turned to the ancient works of scholars, such as Tacitus to validate their claims of white superiority. These writers wrote to promote their white Euro-centrist and pro-Western imperialist ideology. It is important to note that modern white supremacists rely heavily on the historiography of nineteenth century scientific race theorists. Supremacists completely overlook any discussions of racial theory that is dated after the Second World War. White supremacists continue to twist facts of antiquity to justify a means to an end. Additionally, white supremacists use symbols and images of Roman antiquity to harken back to the glory of the Roman Empire. For instance, the white supremacy group, Identity Evropa, implements images of classical white marble sculptures of Julius Caesar in their campaign posters. This is an attempt by white supremacists link to their current movement to the perceived legitimacy and strength of the Roman Empire, as well as that of "western civilization."

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<sup>3</sup> Alan Fram and Jonathan Lemire, "Trump: Why allow immigrants from 'shithole countries,'" *Associated Press*, January 12, 2018, <https://www.apnews.com/fdda2ff0b877416c8ae1c1a77a3cc425>.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

In light of the increasing acts of violence carried out by white supremacy groups, such as the shootings at the Parkland Florida School and the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, I believe that classicists must speak out against the propaganda these groups use. This is an opportune moment for scholars to disseminate fact from fiction in regards to white supremacists' false claims. Through the use of the media as a platform, classicists can educate the public. Additionally, academics need to reach a common ground amongst themselves to best instruct students in the Classics. Curtis Dozier, professor of ancient studies and founder of the website *Pharos*, stated in an interview, “[T]here are ways of studying antiquity that counterbalance and counteract the hateful appropriations of it. I don't think we should feel afraid to start teaching this material in classes.”<sup>5</sup> In other words, Dozier recommends teaching students classical studies so they can spread the truth in a culture where falsehoods run rampant.

In this paper, I begin by examining the writings by racial theorists from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries in order to understand the initial cases of misappropriation of the Classics. In particular, I will focus on the British development of racial thought. I made this decision due to the direct exchange of ideologies that occurred during Britain's colonization of America. In my opinion, this relationship between the two countries greatly influenced the development of racial theory and policy in the United States. I will expose the inaccurate views theorists from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries held regarding race and ethnicity. As a result of these misconceptions, groups such as the Anglo-Saxon clubs of the twentieth century were

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<sup>5</sup> Emma Yeomans, “The far right is using antiquity to re-brand itself – but classicists are fighting back,” *New Statesman America*, July 4, 2018, <https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/media/2018/07/far-right-using-antiquity-re-brand-itself-classicists-are-fighting-back>.

able to flourish and advocate for their agenda based on preserving whiteness. In my opinion, the Anglo-Saxon Clubs of the 20<sup>th</sup> century set precedents for modern white supremacy groups to follow. I will engage directly with sources from antiquity to explain the sentiment and belief ancient scholars held towards ethnicity. Furthermore, I will tie this into modern times, examining modern white supremacists' mis-use of Greco-Roman history. I will argue that the current rise in white supremacy groups is a result of centuries worth of incorrect racial theories based on misconceptions of race in antiquity.

### **Ideas of Race & Ethnicity in Antiquity**

It is critical to understand that the term race is a relatively new concept. The notion of race has evolved due to changing societal and biological beliefs from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries. Race has been used as a tool of distinction to determine who is most racially superior.

Rebecca Futo Kennedy, a classicist who writes extensively on race and ethnicity in the classical world, explains that the ancient Greco-Romans even had a distinct vocabulary dedicated to group organization. These terms include, *ethnos, genos, phylla, gens, natio*.<sup>6</sup> While racial theories vary amongst thinkers of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, historians of antiquity viewed differences amongst peoples as a result of environmental determinism. In other words, they believed climate and geography heavily influences the culture and behavior of various groups of peoples. Therefore it is incorrect of scholars of the nineteenth century to interpret *ethnos* and our modern construction of race as interchangeable. For example, Hippocrates, the Greek physician, recounts the characteristics and traits of the Scythians in his work, *Airs*,

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<sup>6</sup> Rebecca Futo Kennedy, *Why I Teach About Race and Ethnicity in the Classical World*. (North Perth: Eidolon Publications, 2017), 4.

*Waters and Places*.<sup>7</sup> Hippocrates described the Scythians as “red faced, flabby and swollen with water” due to the cold, wet climate they resided in.<sup>8</sup> In contrast, Hippocrates demonstrated his opinion regarding the overall better health and livelihood of those living in the climate most akin to that of Greece.

For the sun in rising and shining upon them purifies them, by dispelling the vapors which generally prevail in the morning. The persons of the inhabitants are, for the most part, well colored and blooming, unless some disease counteract. The inhabitants have clear voices, and in temper and intellect are superior to those which are exposed to the north, and all the productions of the country in like manner are better.

In his opinion, Greece’s climate fared better for the peoples living there. There is a reoccurring idea in scholarly work from antiquity that the Mediterranean climate of the Greco-Roman world provided invaluable health benefits to the area’s inhabitants. Ultimately, Hippocrates’ essay asserted that the fundamental difference between Europe and Asia is due to their respective climates. Hippocrates asserted that the climate variations of Europe tended to make Europeans tougher compared to those of Asia.<sup>9</sup>

Additionally, ancient Greco-Romans’ views were influenced by their understanding of the *oikumene* (*orbis terrarum-Latin*), or the “inhabited world.” The *oikumene* referred to part of the world known to the Greco-Romans and the area and its people whom they didn’t know.<sup>10</sup> The absence and presence of certain terms/language in ancient sources indicates shifting ideas of the civilization in focus. For example, prior to the Persigeran Wars, *barbaros* meant one who did not speak Greek. It was not until after the fifth century when it is used as an insult to denote the entire non-Greek world.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Rebecca Futo Kennedy, *Why I Teach About Race and Ethnicity in the Classical World*. (North Perth: Eidolon Publications, 2017), 4.

<sup>8</sup> Hippocrates, *Airs, Waters, Places* 15.

<sup>9</sup> Denise Eileen McCoskey, *Race: Antiquity and Its Legacy*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 46.

<sup>10</sup>Denise Eileen McCoskey, *Race: Antiquity and Its Legacy*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 36.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

The Persian War was the first time in Greek history when a large number of states from all over the Greek speaking world were involved in a united military campaign.<sup>12</sup> The catalyst at most of these times was due to a common enemy that posed a threat to the *poleis*.

However, many ancient societies relied instead upon the use of ethnicities to distinguish themselves. For example, ethnicity was used to name identities among Greeks (Athenians and Spartans) and between Greeks and others (Greeks & Egyptians).<sup>13</sup> There was not a biological determinant understanding of people in antiquity as there is now.

Further, alongside the environmental determinism theory, the concept of physiognomy was integral to the Greco-Romans' understanding of the differences among people. Physiognomy is the study of the systematic correspondence of psychological characteristics to facial features or body structures.<sup>14</sup> Aristotle's work, *Physiognōmonika* (Physiognomics), significantly added to the overall understanding of the field of study. Aristotle explained how a physiognomist, the person conducting the observation, conducted research, and the attributes a physiognomist records as part of their findings. Such data includes, the "movements, shapes, colors and facial features including the amount of hair, smoothness of the skin, voice, from the condition of the flesh, from parts of the body and from the general character of the body."<sup>15</sup> Aristotle and other physiognomists applied their findings they found while studying various species of

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<sup>12</sup> Edith Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self Definition through Tragedy*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 11.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 31

<sup>14</sup> *Britannica Academic*, s.v. "Physiognomy," accessed April 27, 2019, <https://academic.eb.com/levels/collegiate/article/physiognomy/1131>.

<sup>15</sup> Aristotle, *Physiognomics*, 93.806a.29-34.

animals onto that of man. Physical traits such as the softness or coarseness of an animal's hair determined the likelihood of the animal's overall personality traits. For this reason, Aristotle hypothesized that since "deer and sheep are the most timid of all animals and have the softest hair; the lion and wild boar are the bravest and have very stiff hair."<sup>16</sup> From these physical characteristics, the physiognomist was able to determine the overall nature and behavior of the person. Aristotle drew the same conclusions in comparison of peoples living in the north, who are "brave and stiff haired, and those in the south who are cowards as a result of their soft hair."<sup>17</sup>

Those who have thick necks are strong in character; witness the male. Those whose necks are light are weak; witness the female. Those whose necks are full and thick are of savage temper; witness savage-tempered bulls. But those whose neck is of large size without being thick are magnanimous; witness the lions. Those whose neck is long and thin are cowardly; witness the deer. Those in whom it is too short are crafty; witness the wolves.<sup>18</sup>

The supposed evidence physiognomists collected, were often used to make generalizations about whole groups of people. For example, since Ethiopians have soft, "wooly hair," a trait found primarily in the south, Aristotle labelled all Ethiopians as cowards.<sup>19</sup>

Early writings on racial theory initially mirrored the thoughts and rationale of scholars in antiquity. In the eighteenth century, there was a resurgence of environmental theory, dating back to antiquity. The discussion of race in modern times proves to be equally divisive in terms of its existence in antiquity. Most scholars of classical studies are in agreement that ancient Greco-Romans displayed ethnic prejudices and xenophobic views, but whether or not they were explicitly racist is a

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 93.806b.10-13.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 93.806b.16-20.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 120.811a.10-20.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 130.812b.30-35.

contested theory. The scholarship of historian Benjamin Isaac titled, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity*, is central to this argument. Isaac, early on in his argument, defined race as, “An attitude towards individuals and groups of peoples which posits a direct and linear connection between physical and mental qualities. It therefore attributes to those individuals and groups of peoples collective traits, physical, mental, and moral, which are constant and unalterable by human will, because they are caused by hereditary factors or external influences, such as climate or geography.”<sup>20</sup> Isaac argued that in addition to the ethnic prejudices and xenophobic behavior of the Greco-Romans, both groups engaged in proto racism. Isaac maintained that due to the Greco-Romans reliance on the environmental determinist theory, as well as physiognomy, to explain the inherent differences amongst groups it contributed to the precursor of later understandings of race.

Most notable from Isaac’s work is his discussion of the Athenian notions of autochthony and “pure lineage.” Autochthony means to be “born literally from the earth,” that essentially you are sprung from the soil where you live.<sup>21</sup> Recognizing the importance as to which Athenians in antiquity held this to be true allows for a greater understanding as to their own self-perception amongst others. Pericles’ law of 451 BCE, demonstrates the lengths Athenians would go to uphold their “pure lineage.” The law mandated that “citizenship would only be granted to children whose mother and father were both Athenians.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Benjamin Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 23.

<sup>21</sup> *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, s.v. “autochthons.” DOI: 10.1093/acrefore/9780199381135.013.1003.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas R. Martin, “The Citizenship Law of Pericles,” *An Overview of Classical Greek History from Mycenae to Alexander* 9.3.1.

Four years afterwards, in the archonship of Lysicrates, the thirty judges called the Local Justices were instituted again<sup>1</sup>; and two years after Lysicrates, in the year of Antidotus, owing to the large number of the citizens an enactment was passed on the proposal of Pericles confining citizenship to persons of citizen birth on both sides.<sup>23</sup>

The leading world powers of the seventeenth centuries onward, such as Great Britain, used race to justify colonialism and the subjugation and enslavement of Africans.<sup>24</sup> Prior to the age of exploration and imperialism, several events in England's history served as a catalyst for the earliest inception of racial theory. These theories had a profound impact on the United States' attitude towards race.

The English were instrumental in creating a racial worldview that would influence the United States and other global imperial powers. Pivotal turning points in England's history sparked the development of this ethnocentric ideology regarding race. A major turning point occurred during the sixteenth century with the separation of the nation from the Catholic Church and the founding of the Church of England. Audrey Smedley explores this period extensively in her book, *Race in North America*, in which she emphasized that during this shifting time, England sought to redefine their historical identity. It was imperative for England's new identity to be distinct, on its own and apart from outside influences. Smedley argues that as a result, Englishmen conceived the idea of the Anglo-Saxon identity. Notably, the Anglo-Saxon identity presented itself during a time fraught with shifts in England. Englishmen turned to

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<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0009%3Achapter%3D9%3Asection%3D3%3Asubsection%3D1#note1>

<sup>23</sup> Aristotle. *Ath. Pol.* 16.5.

<sup>24</sup> Denise Eileen McCoskey, *Race: Antiquity and Its Legacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 3.

tribal histories that predated the invasion of the Romans and Normans as sources of inspiration.<sup>25</sup>

English scholars determined that the Anglo-Saxons followed a “pure religion,” living under free political institutions. Anglo Saxon descendants inherited their social system from their German forbearers. This shared history with the Germani contributed to the growing superior sense of self that Britain developed compared to other European nations. This distinct identity, at least in the eyes of the Englishmen, led to the development of Britain’s chauvinistic culture. Unsurprisingly, Britain’s culture fostered intolerance and ethnic conflicts, even though they were a growing nation state until the nineteenth century. Scholars continued to research in order to bolster the validity of Britain’s ties to their Anglo Saxon ancestors, and strengthen their German forebears’ supposed superiority. Sixteenth century English scholars credited the excellence of their social system to their German forbearers.

One of the most prominent sources used amongst theorists was from Tacitus, the second century Roman historian. Tacitus wrote at length about the Germani tribes of Germania in his historical chronicle titled *Histories*. Tacitus expressed a great interest in the Germani, especially their courageous spirit, virtuous culture, and more simplistic lifestyle compared to the Romans. Tacitus commended the Germani for their marriage customs and for living a “life of sheltered chastity.”<sup>26</sup> He credited this to the absence of “public shows or the excitement of banquets that plagues Roman society and contributes to its lustful ways.”<sup>27</sup> However, Tacitus’ writing did not always support of all Germani.

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<sup>25</sup> Audrey Smedley, *Race in North America: Origin and Evolution of a Worldview* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993), 188-190.

<sup>26</sup> Tacitus, *Agricola and Germany*, 47.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

For instance, in his description of Germanic tribes in the section titled, “Further Western Peoples,” Tacitus contradicted his previous praise of the Germani’s courageous spirit.

Long may the barbarians continue, I pray, if not to love us, at least to hate one another, seeing that, as fate bears remorselessly on the empire, fortune can offer no greater boom now than discord among our enemies.<sup>28</sup>

Tacitus wrote this in response to the fighting and slaughter of Germania tribes by fellow Germani. The use of the term barbarian is very indicative of the Roman bias that appeared often in the writings of Roman scholars, such as Tacitus. For all the praise that Tacitus gave the Germani, he never came close to considering them equal to the Romans. In Tacitus’ opinion, the Germani lacked the organization and discipline in comparison to the Roman military. Additionally, Tacitus showed his Roman snobbery in passing judgement on the Germani’s layout and infrastructure. Tacitus even suggested that the Germani lacked skill in building as a way to explain their housing choices.<sup>29</sup> Ultimately, Tacitus’ critical language used to describe the Germani demonstrates a distinct theme of Roman scholarship, namely labeling non-Romans as barbarians.

Despite Tacitus’ critical statements about the Germani, eighteenth century scholars largely focused on the Roman historian’s praise of their Germanic ancestors. Certain passages in particular sought to prove Germani’s inherent purity and superiority, providing the basis for their ethnocentrism.

I myself accept the view of those who judge that the peoples of Germany have never been contaminated by intermarriage with other nations and that the race remains unique, pure, and unlike any other.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 39.

## Classical Reception alongside Race Theory

Moreover, the field of classics traces its roots back to the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Much of the historiography written during this time is laden with racist thinking and should be taken with a grain of salt.<sup>31</sup> There were numerous factors that contributed to this sentiment. Scholars, Alexis Heraclides and Ada Dialla, write extensively regarding the presence of the language and rhetoric of antiquity in nineteenth century imperialism.<sup>32</sup> In the eighteenth century, Georges Buffon and Johann Blumenbach, created a new concept of race, ranking people's 'races' in a hierarchical fashion.<sup>33</sup> Arthur de Gobineau, a French writer, was a leading thinker in the field of race science. De Gobineau is credited with creating the Aryan master race theory. In his work titled, *An Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races*, De Gobineau said, "[t]he races of mankind were innately unequal with the 'Aryans' as the master race."

Similarly, Houston Stewart Chamberlain, a German philosopher, expanded on Arthur de Gobineau's development of race theory. Chamberlain's theory developed alongside the emerging thought of sexual selection, which was influenced by the environmental determinism theory taken from antiquity. Chamberlain claimed that the main developments of western civilization, Greco-Roman philosophy and art and Christianity, were due to the Aryan race.

Additionally, a plethora of written works in the nineteenth century refer to words easily identifiable in Greco-Roman writings. For example, the usage of "barbarian" is a

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<sup>31</sup> *Western Civilization means Classics... and White Supremacy*. (Vassar: Vassar Edu, 2019), 3.

<sup>32</sup> Alexis Heraclides & Ada Dialla, "Eurocentrism, 'civilization' and the 'barbarians'." In *Humanitarian Intervention in the Long Nineteenth Century: Setting the Precedent*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), 32- 35.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

direct reference to the ancient Greco-Romans' vernacular. The above mentioned scholars of "Eurocentrism, 'civilization' and the 'barbarians'", Heraclides and Dialla, heavily engaged with the biological racism theory written at this time. The two examined the language used in international law to demonstrate the level at which this thought processes was embedded in every aspect of society and law. For example, they found nineteenth century international laws that stated "the law cannot apply to barbarians, for they cannot reciprocate those who do not share Christian principles."

Furthermore, nineteenth century conceptions of race cannot be discussed without mention of Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species*, written in 1859.<sup>34</sup> Darwin focused on terms regarding the biological evolution of animal species. At this time, there was already a push by race scientists to connect the color of a person's skin to their overall potential and behavior. Darwin's conceptions of the modern theory of evolution and natural selection laid the groundwork for further racial development. Darwin defined natural selection as the explanation for why certain organisms have more-useful traits, i.e. exceptional vision.<sup>35</sup> Nineteenth century racial theorists took Darwin's findings and used them to explain their perceptions of differences among Homo sapiens. For instance, the theorist, Herbert Spencer, applied the study of Social Darwinism to the social sciences when he coined the term, "survival of the fittest."

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<sup>34</sup> Rutledge M. Dennis, "Social Darwinism, Scientific Racism and the Metaphysics of Race," *Journal of Negro Education* 64, no. 3 (1995): 245-247, [https://www-jstor-org.libdatabase.newpaltz.edu/stable/2967206?Search=yes&resultItemClick=true&searchText=Social&searchText=Darwinism%2C&searchText=Scientific&searchText=Racism&searchText=and&searchText=the&searchText=Metaphysics&searchText=of&searchText=Race&searchUri=%2Faction%2FdoBasicSearch%3Ffc%3Doff%26amp%3Bacc%3Don%26amp%3Bgroup%3Dnone%26amp%3Bwc%3Don%26amp%3BQuery%3DSocial%2BDarwinism%252C%2BScientific%2BRacism%2Band%2Bthe%2BMetaphysics%2Bof%2BRace&ab\\_segments=0%2Fdefault-2%2Fcontrol&refreqid=search%3A39eed67e475e979d004772e820949b98&seq=1#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://www-jstor-org.libdatabase.newpaltz.edu/stable/2967206?Search=yes&resultItemClick=true&searchText=Social&searchText=Darwinism%2C&searchText=Scientific&searchText=Racism&searchText=and&searchText=the&searchText=Metaphysics&searchText=of&searchText=Race&searchUri=%2Faction%2FdoBasicSearch%3Ffc%3Doff%26amp%3Bacc%3Don%26amp%3Bgroup%3Dnone%26amp%3Bwc%3Don%26amp%3BQuery%3DSocial%2BDarwinism%252C%2BScientific%2BRacism%2Band%2Bthe%2BMetaphysics%2Bof%2BRace&ab_segments=0%2Fdefault-2%2Fcontrol&refreqid=search%3A39eed67e475e979d004772e820949b98&seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents).

<sup>35</sup> Britannica Academic, s.v. "Evolution," accessed May 8, 2019, <https://academic-eb-com.libdatabase.newpaltz.edu/levels/collegiate/article/evolution/106075>.

Ideologies from the Enlightenment, such as *laissez faire* and individualism, coupled with Social Darwinism, created the perfect storm for the divisive racial tension that was present in the nineteenth century and continues today.

The theory of Social Darwinism greatly supported Western nations, including the United States and England, during the Age of Imperialism of “uncivilized countries.” The Age of Imperialism proved to be a key moment in the history the United States’ racial studies and culture of institutional racism. This impact is very apparent in the writings of the sociologist, William Graham Sumner, a leader of Social Darwinism in the United States. Naturally, Sumner held the belief that slavery in the United States fell in accordance with the laws of Social Darwinism.<sup>36</sup> Sumner wrote that slavery “helped the whole of society to a higher status, a process that also profited the slaves.”<sup>37</sup>

British historian and Romano-British archaeologist, Francis Haverfield’s works can be used as a model for nineteenth and early twentieth century classicists’ beliefs. Hofstadter, examined the effects of Social Darwinist theory on United States’ society in his 1944 book, *Social Darwinism in American Thought*.

In the decades after 1865, Anglo-Saxonism, belligerent or pacific, was the dominant abstract rationale of American imperialism....The Darwinist mood sustained the belief in Anglo-Saxon racial superiority of which many American thinkers in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The measure of world domination already achieved by the “race” seemed to prove it the fittest.<sup>38</sup>

Haverfield represented the growing British reception of classics and the establishment of universities. Academia at the time drew heavily from the classics,

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<sup>36</sup> Robert Bierstedt, *American Sociological Theory: A Critical History*. (Cambridge: Academic Press, 1981), 29.

<sup>37</sup> William Graham Sumner, *Folkways: A Study of Mores, Manners, Customs and Morals*. (Ginn: The University of Michigan, 1906), 271.

<sup>38</sup> Richard Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 177-180.

which were viewed as fundamental to an excellent education. Haverfield was instrumental in the founding of professional British-Romano archaeology.<sup>39</sup> Additionally, Haverfield drew parallels between the British and Roman Empires. Most notably, he remarked that these two civilizations were “essential preservers of Western civilization. In accordance with the xenophobic mindset Western European nations held towards the East at the turn of the century, Haverfield said,

We know also, or fancy we know, that our own civilization is firmly planted in three continents and there is little to fear from yellow or other peril. Yet, if the European nations fall to destroying each other, such dangers may recur; we have still to look unto the pit whence we digged. The man who studies the Roman frontier-system studies not only great work, but one which has given us all modern Western Europe.<sup>40</sup>

Haverfield essentially compared the British Empire to that of the Roman Empire. Haverfield’s use of the word “yellow” is a direct reference to the longstanding fear and distrust of the East. This fear and belief has been continuously used among Western thinkers, with roots dating from the ancient Greco-Roman period. This quote further demonstrates the elevated way in which the British viewed themselves at the height of European imperialism. The quote also shows the sense of indebtedness Haverfield believed Western Europe owed to the Roman Empire. Of course, when Haverfield wrote his address, he had no idea of the coming world wars which would cause a massive upheaval to Britain’s power in the global sphere, ultimately rendering Britain’s position unrecognizable to Haverfield in fifty years.

### **Race Theory in the United States**

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<sup>39</sup> Eric Adler, *Valorizing the Barbarians: Enemy Speeches in Roman Historiography*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012), 3.

<sup>40</sup> Francis Haverfield, “The Inaugural Address delivered at the first General Meeting of the Society with the Report of the Committee,” *An Inaugural Address Delivered before the First Annual General Meeting of the Society, 11<sup>th</sup> May, 1911*. (Cambridge: Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies, 1911), xix.

The United States owes a lot of its ideology and thought process to Europe, especially Britain. The exchange of ideologies between the former mother country and its former colony helped shape the values and belief systems ingrained in the United States. The United States' current political thought process has been heavily influenced by the study and misappropriation of the Classics in the early years of the United States. For instance, this misappropriation is present in Thomas Jefferson's Query XIV of Jefferson's Notes on the State of Virginia, in which he lays out his belief in the inherent supremacy of white people and inferiority of black people.<sup>41</sup>

I advance it therefore as a suspicion only, that the blacks, whether originally a distinct race, or made distinct by time and circumstances, are inferior to the whites in the endowments both of body and mind. It is not against experience to suppose, that different species of the same genus, or varieties of the same species, may possess different qualifications. Will not a lover of natural history then, one who views the gradations in all the races of animals with the eye of philosophy, excuse an effort to keep those in the department of man as distinct as nature has formed them?<sup>42</sup>

Jefferson's writings, published in 1785, on the racial differences between white and black people is indicative of the shift in racial theory towards scientific racism. The last sentence of Jefferson's statement is overwhelmingly laden in racism but proposed in the context of a philosophical question. Jefferson ultimately questioned what authority he, as a white man, had to alter the position nature supposedly chose to place black people within the hierarchy of races. Jefferson engaged with the language and thought processes of his fellow race scientists in numerous ways throughout Query XIV. He debated the superior beauty of the white race compared with blacks, in terms of black people's color, body figure, and hair.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Sarah Teets, *Classical Slavery and Jeffersonian Racism: Charlottesville, One Year Later*. (North Perth: Eidolon Publications, 2018), 4.

<sup>42</sup> Thomas Jefferson, "Query XIV." *Notes on the State of Virginia*. (London: John Stockdale, 1785), N/A.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

The first difference which strikes us is that of color. Whether the black of the negro resides in the reticular membrane between the skin and scarf-skin, or in the scarf-skin itself; whether it proceeds from the color of the blood, the color of the bile, or from that of some other secretion, the difference is fixed in nature, and is as real as if its seat and cause were better known to us.

They have less hair on the face and body. They secrete less by the kidney, and more by the glands of the skin, which gives them a very strong and disagreeable odor. This greater degree of transpiration renders them more tolerant of heat, and less so of cold, than the whites.<sup>44</sup>

Additionally, Jefferson claimed that black slaves benefited in every respect from their contact with their white slave holders. Ultimately, Jefferson argued that black people inherently fell short in comparison with white people due to a biological difference between the races. Jefferson even referenced the accounts of white Roman slaves in writings from antiquity to demonstrate that despite the harsher treatment Roman slaves endured, they possessed integrity and remarkable skills in the arts and sciences compared to black slaves.

Yet 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. Epictetus, Terence, and Phaedrus, were slaves. But they were of the race of whites. It is not their condition then, but nature, which has produced the distinction.<sup>45</sup>

Jefferson relied heavily on Plutarch's, *Life of Cato the Elder*, for his justification as to why the enslavement and the treatment of the enslaved in the New World was far better than it was in antiquity. Jefferson selected passages from *Life of Cato the Elder* that best demonstrate the cruelty Roman slaves endured.

He was always contriving that his slaves should have feuds and dissensions among themselves; harmony among them made him suspicious and fearful of them. He had those who were suspected of some capital offence brought to trial before all their fellow servants, and, if convicted, put to death.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Plutarch, *Life of Cato the Elder*, 21.4.

In Jefferson's opinion this further explained why white people were inherently superior to black people. These claims were heavily steeped in the white eurocentrist and imperialistic attitude of the eighteenth century. Unfortunately, this mindset did not fade away with time, but is now experiencing a resurgence.

Jefferson helped sow the seeds for future belief in this idea of racial superiority. Thomas Jefferson had a strong interest in Anglo-Saxonism, as a result of the United States' relationship with England.<sup>47</sup> Jefferson's interest in the Anglo-Saxons and their history of expansion prompted American expansion of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These values fed into the belief that white people were the ones destined to conquer the United States and ultimately fulfill their Manifest Destiny. This exact sentiment is rampant amongst the ideologies of white supremacists in the twenty-first century.

### **Eugenics in the U.S. and Growing Racial Tensions**

Further, towards the turn of the twentieth century, racial theory turned its focus towards eugenics. This new development aimed to address deficiencies amongst different races via sexual selection. Francis Galton coined the term "eugenics" in his 1883 essay, "Inquiries into Human Faculty and Development." In the fashion of the academia research at the time, Galton formed the term "eugenics" from the Greek root, *eugenes*, meaning "well born."<sup>48</sup> Focusing on physical as opposed to "moral" qualities, Galton advocated selective breeding to improve the "health, energy, ability, manliness,

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<sup>47</sup> Audrey Smedley, *Race in North America: Origin and Evolution of a Worldview* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993), 191.

<sup>48</sup> Howard Markel, "The False, Racist Theory of Eugenics Once Ruled Science. Let's Never Let that Happen Again," PBS NewsHour, Feb. 16, 2018, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/column-the-false-racist-theory-of-eugenics-once-ruled-science-lets-never-let-that-happen-again>.

and courteous disposition” of the human species in his later essay, “Eugenics: Its Definition, Scope, and Aims.”<sup>49</sup> In turn, this prompted policy makers to advocate for legislation that aimed to protect people whose genes would “improve” the human race from those who were perceived as a threat. People who identified as white upper middle class, preferably of Protestant faith, were highly encouraged to reproduce. These people had ties with the growing number of Anglo-Saxon clubs whose overall influence was very apparent across the United States during the Progressive Era. Those assigned to the population of race denigrators included alcoholics, people of color, the mentally ill, and immigrants from southern and eastern Europe.

During the Progressive Era, numerous legislative measures were passed in response to fear of “the other.” For instance, the Immigration Restriction Act was enacted in 1924 and set restrictions on the number of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe and Asia who were allowed to enter the United States.<sup>50</sup> Within the same year, Racial Integrity Act of 1924 became another influential piece of legislation. The Racial Integrity Act of 1924 “designated every person in the state as either white or ‘colored’ and criminalized interracial marriage.”<sup>51</sup> The language of the act itself demonstrates the blatant racism and culture of the United States in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The bill begins as follows:

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<sup>49</sup> Michael James, *Race: The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017), 7-11.

<sup>50</sup> Elisabeth A. Cawthon, “Immigration Act of 1924,” Salem Press Encyclopedia. <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,url,uid,cookie&db=ers&AN=89315016>.

<sup>51</sup> John Woodrow Cox. "Death of 'a devil': The white supremacist got hit by a car. His victims celebrated.; Walter A. Plecker used his position as head of Virginia's Bureau of Vital Statistics to champion the Racial Integrity Act of 1924, which designated every person in the state as either white or "colored" and criminalized interracial marriage." *Washington Post Blogs* . August 2, 2017. <https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:5P56-RGX1-JB4M-V11T-00000-00&context=1516831>.

This bill aims at correcting a condition which only the more thoughtful people of Virginia know the existence of.... Unless radical measures are used to prevent it, Virginia and other parts of the Nation must surely in time go the way of all other countries in which people of two or more races have lived in close contact.... The public must be led to look with scorn and contempt upon the man who will degrade himself and do harm to society by such abhorrent deeds.<sup>52</sup>

The Racial Integrity Act of 1924 not only criminalized interracial marriages but encouraged persons to outwardly condemn this type of behavior. These acts laid the foundation for white supremacists' mentality of the white race's supposed superiority, which needed to be protected and kept taint free, no matter the costs. The Racial Integrity Act of 1924 may have been overturned following the Supreme Court's decision in *Loving v. Virginia* in 1967, but its implications pertaining to race relations in the United States have tainted the mindsets of the generations since.

### **Classical Reception by White Supremacists**

It is imperative to understand that claims of a white hegemony in the Roman Empire are entirely false. Any such claims are misguided since the Roman Empire was comprised of various ethnic backgrounds and cultures. Tacitus' claim of the Germani's "racial purity" in *Agricola and Germany* garnered a large following amongst nineteenth century race theorists. By the nineteenth century, this passage would provide the basis for the conception of the Aryan race, a staple component of the Nazi party. The writings of eighteenth century theorists continue to be used by white supremacists throughout history. Twenty-first century white supremacists continue to use the classics in order to

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<sup>52</sup> W. A. Plecker, "The New Virginia Law to Preserve Racial Integrity," *Virginia Health Bulletin*, (Rockbridge County Clerk's Correspondence,) vol. XVI, March 1924. <https://s3.amazonaws.com/omeka-net/3933/archive/files/a21dd53f2a098fca5199e481433b4eb2.pdf?AWSAccessKeyId=AKIAI3ATG3OSQLO5HGKA&Expires=1558569600&Signature=ju7UvNXMO1qHeyoSnZYaLp%2B8FyY%3D>

validate their claims of inherent white superiority. Such claims are extremely misguided by incorrect references to the classics. It is ironic since white nationalists cling to this idea that the Roman Empire was a hegemonic state comprised of white people, when it was actually one of the most diverse group of peoples. This is true not only for the provinces, but for the city itself. Noblemen in all levels of society came from diverse backgrounds. This was a key characteristic of Rome and was a constant driving factor in the discussion of determining one's Romanness. An introductory course to the history of the Rome informs the reader that Rome was founded by criminals and outcasts of society. Soon after the city was founded, the men took it upon themselves to kidnap the nearby Sabine women in order to populate their newly founded city.<sup>53</sup> Rome existed within a sphere of various cultural influences and was in a constant state of exchange.

These notions of whiteness in ancient Greco-Roman are shaped by incorrect classical reception, partially due to the cultural artifacts that exist and are available for scholars of antiquity. There was no equivalent to the systematic racism that exists in contemporary United States in ancient Rome. White supremacy groups' obsession with race was not as present in antiquity as modern historians tend to portray it. This is due to the fact that the modern conception of race is based on biological differences. However, white supremacy groups frequently use images and symbols from antiquity to evoke a nostalgia of the "might of ancient Rome" in their propaganda. The presence of images and symbols from antiquity are frequently used in white supremacy groups' propaganda and recruitment tactics. They are used to evoke nostalgia of the "mighty Roman Empire" to entice recruit. For instance, Evropa Identity, a white supremacy

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<sup>53</sup> Livy, *History of Rome*, 1.58.

group based in the United States, heavily implements this tactic. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, SPLC, Identity Evropa, aims to “raise white racial consciousness, build a community based on shared racial identity and intellectualize white supremacist ideology.”<sup>54</sup> Identity Evropa played a key role in organizing process behind the “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville in August of 2017.

As of March 2019, Identity Evropa underwent a change in identity and now refer to themselves as the “American Identity Movement.” Identity Evropa is well known for their use of ancient Greco-Roman visuals in their recruitment process at college campuses. By means of their campus flyer campaigns, the group is able to gain attention and increase membership. These flyers feature classical European sculptures, such as Michelangelo’s statue of David or Nicolas Coustou’s Julius Caesar. Below the images, in bold white text, lie the subliminal white supremacy messages such as “Protect Your Heritage” and “Serve Your People.” These phrases alone convey an “us versus them” mentality to the reader. The text urges the reader to worry about the survival of the “white American identity,” and fear the threat found in the United States’ changing demographics. The statues are used since they are easily recognizable, but most importantly they evoke a sense of greatness and strength associated with Rome in antiquity, especially these towering male figures. In dual part, they serve as fodder to bolster white nationalists’ claim of the “inherent supremacy of the white race.”

### **“The Supremacy of Online White Supremacists”- An Analysis**

A study published in 2015, “The supremacy of online white supremacists – an analysis of online discussions by white supremacists,” analyzes the discussion content of

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<sup>54</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center, “Identity Evropa,” *SPLC Designated Hate Group*, accessed May 3, 2019, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/identity-evropa>.

five online white supremacist forums.<sup>55</sup> The internet offers itself as a sort of “safe haven” for white supremacy groups since it allows for easy dissemination of information free from the restraints of the mainstream media at a low personal risk.<sup>56</sup> The method for the study is as follows: “A qualitative analysis on a sample of the posts on the forum, in addition to using an automated web-crawler to sample 10,000 threads for the existence of hyperlinks leading out of the forum.”<sup>57</sup> Part of the study’s supplemental content included information regarding the inner workings of white supremacy groups, such as Stormfront. Additionally the researchers touched upon the predominant topics of discussion circulating these forums. These topics include white supremacists’ opinion that the white race is being targeted and at risk of persecution as more and more restraints are placed upon them.<sup>58</sup> The 2015 study surmised from the presence of iconographic symbols from antiquity on white supremacists’ websites that; “By displaying culturally significant symbols of hate, extremist organizations attempt to generate within individuals a sense of belongingness to their cause as well as aiding in the group’s identity support.”<sup>59</sup>

Overall the study found that information provision, i.e. spread of propaganda, accounted for over 71% of the discussion content posted on these sites.<sup>60</sup> This includes

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<sup>55</sup> Meghan A. Wong, Richard Frank, and Russell Allsup, *The Supremacy of Online White Supremacists – An Analysis of Online Discussions by White Supremacists*. (Abingdon: Routledge Publishing Co., 2015), 43.

<sup>56</sup> Josh Adams and Vincent J. Roscigno, *White Supremacists, Oppositional Culture and the World Wide Web*. (Columbus: Ohio State University, 2005), 759.

<sup>57</sup> Meghan A. Wong, Richard Frank, and Russell Allsup, *The Supremacy of Online White Supremacists – An Analysis of Online Discussions by White Supremacists*. (Abingdon: Routledge Publishing Co., 2015), 50.

<sup>58</sup> Josh Adams and Vincent J. Roscigno, *White Supremacists, Oppositional Culture and the World Wide Web*. (Columbus: Ohio State University, 2005), 762.

<sup>59</sup> Meghan A. Wong, Richard Frank, and Russell Allsup, *The Supremacy of Online White Supremacists – An Analysis of Online Discussions by White Supremacists*. (Abingdon: Routledge Publishing Co., 2015), 46.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 71

speculation of the historical accuracy surrounding the Holocaust, the accomplishments of antiquity, and the enslavement of African Americans in the United States.<sup>61</sup> These findings shed light on the extent of which misinformation is circulated within these organizations.

### **Myth of Whiteness in Antiquity**

An article published by *The New Yorker* in October of 2018, “The Myth of Whiteness in Classical Sculpture,” addresses the developing discovery that statues from the Greco-Roman period were originally painted and not always the stark white marble color they are now.<sup>62</sup> The article introduced the long held contested idea that art from antiquity was actually products of polychrome and not monochrome. The discovery of this truth contains implications that extend far beyond the realm of art history. It directly affects our understanding of the ancient Greco-Romans and impacts the perception of white superiority as well as the ideals of whiteness in terms of beauty. Scholar of Classics, Mark Abbe spoke at length in the *New Yorker* article about his view regarding the presupposed absence of color in antiquity, “the idea that the ancients disdained bright color “is the most common misconception about Western aesthetics in the history of Western art.” It is, he said, “a lie we all hold dear.”<sup>63</sup>

With the help of L.E.D lights and advancements in technology, such as X-ray fluorescence analysis, researchers can now identify the original color pigmentations applied to the art. For example, scholars are discovering that ancients used more than one base layer of colors, such as opaque white as the initial layer and a topcoat of

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 47

<sup>62</sup> Margaret Talbot, “The Myth of Whiteness in Classical Sculpture,” *The New Yorker*, October 22, 2016.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

Egyptian blue or cinnabar.<sup>64</sup> The writer and artist, David Batchelor, goes into further detail concerning the headstrong attitude of people who support the idea of monochromatic architecture and sculpture from antiquity in his book *Chromophobia*.

It is, I believe, no exaggeration to say that, in the West, since Antiquity, colour has been systematically marginalized, reviled, diminished and degraded. Generations of philosophers, artists, art historians and cultural theorists of one stripe or another have kept this prejudice alive, warm, fed and groomed. As with all prejudices, its manifest form, its loathing, masks a fear: a fear of contamination and corruption by something that is unknown or appears unknowable. This loathing of colour, this fear of corruption through colour, needs a name: chromophobia.<sup>65</sup>

Additionally, Batchelor discusses western culture's tendency to minimize the significance of the presence of color. Batchelor's text speaks to the larger issue of classical reception and the "west's white is right mentality." This belief overlaps with white supremacists who vehemently believe in a strictly white Greco-Roman interpretation of history. White supremacists are notorious for being selective when it comes to the historical evidence they use to construct their arguments. It is imperative to call into question the sources white supremacists use, since they primarily ignore modern scholarship on the Classics. Instead, white supremacists rely mainly on the writings of historians from the sixteenth to nineteenth century. This speaks to the larger issue occurring within the field of Classics. The term, "western civilization," triggers both positive and negative associations.

### **Western Civilization & United States' Education**

It is important to note the significance behind Identity Evropa's choice to use images from antiquity in as part of their propaganda. The certainty they possess that

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> David Batchelor, *Chromophobia* (London, United Kingdom: Reaktion Books, 2000), 22.

college students across the nation will be able to identify these figures speaks volumes to the time allocated towards studying figures of “western civilization” in secondary school. However, it is imperative to understand that “western civilization” is a relatively new concept in the history of education. The concept of western civilization is embedded in the United States’ education system. Western civilization courses became an integral part of an undergraduate college’s curriculum at the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>66</sup> At this time, the higher education system in the United States underwent a shift to more specialized degrees such as biological chemistry, economics, psychology, etc.<sup>67</sup> Western civilization courses were first introduced in 1919 at Columbia University, but its roots extend further back. The leading institutions at the time such as, Harvard, Amherst College and Stanford were influential in the early introductory courses to European history.<sup>68</sup> Writer, Gilbert Allardyce, expressed his opinion towards the emergence of “western civilization” in general education in an article published by the *American Historical Review*, stating, “In this no man’s land between high school and advanced college work at the junior-senior level, the Western Civ class emerged as the ancestral course of the general education curriculum.”<sup>69</sup>

Further, a 1989 publication by the *American Historical Review* stressed that the United States’ emergence as a world power in the twentieth century contributed to the

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<sup>66</sup> Gilbert Allardyce, "The Rise and Fall of the Western Civilization Course." *The American Historical Review* 87, no. 3 (June 1982): 698

<sup>67</sup> Claudia Goldin and Lawrence F. Katz, “The Shaping of Higher Education: The Formative Years in the United States, 1890 to 1940,” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 13, no. 1 (Winter 1999): 39 [https://scholar.harvard.edu/goldin/files/the\\_shaping\\_of\\_higher\\_education\\_the\\_formative\\_years\\_in\\_the\\_united\\_states\\_1890-1940.pdf](https://scholar.harvard.edu/goldin/files/the_shaping_of_higher_education_the_formative_years_in_the_united_states_1890-1940.pdf).

<sup>68</sup> Gilbert Allardyce, "The Rise and Fall of the Western Civilization Course." *The American Historical Review* 87, no. 3 (June 1982): 698

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

United States' desire to establish their position alongside that of western civilization.<sup>70</sup> This sense urgency sparked universities to require students from all disciplines to receive, in their mind, the invaluable history of western civilizations. Meanwhile, at the high school level, the Committee of Seven gave their approval for the familiar "block system" approach that continues to exist in United States high school curriculum today.<sup>71</sup> The Committee of Seven was formed under the American Historical Association, and was charged with reviewing the history education programs in American high schools.<sup>72</sup> The "block system" requires high school students to study ancient history, European history, including Medieval and Modern European history, English history, and American history and government.<sup>73</sup> Most notably, the Committee of Seven specified that a significant amount of time should be dedicated to the Greeks and Romans. The Committee of Seven remarked, "We speak of these nations as belonging to antiquity, but we have much of them with us today. The law of Rome has not gone; the highest thought of Greece is eternal."<sup>74</sup> History courses continue to be taught focusing almost entirely on white western civilizations' achievements and contributions. The decision to mandate a "block history education," coupled with the racial theory of the nineteenth century that upheld the false claims of the white race's superiority, helped solidify "western civilizations" position in society. Unsurprisingly, the term has become associated with white supremacy.

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<sup>70</sup> Gilbert Allardyce, "The Rise and Fall of the Western Civilization Course." *The American Historical Review* 87, no. 3 (June 1982): 699

<sup>71</sup> Gilbert Allardyce, "The Rise and Fall of the Western Civilization Course." *The American Historical Review* 87, no. 3 (June 1982): 702.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 701.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 702.

<sup>74</sup> American Historical Association, "Four Years' Course, Consisting of Four Blocks or Periods," *The Study of History in Schools*, accessed May 3, 2019, <https://www.historians.org/about-aha-and-membership/aha-history-and-archives/historical-archives/the-study-of-history-in-schools/four-years-course-consisting-of-four-blocks-or-periods>.

A great deal of professors and scholars continue to view the term “western civilization” as a fact rather than a construct developed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to support the actions of Western European nations’ and the United States’ imperialist campaigns. For instance, SUNY New Paltz, in adherence with the SUNY wide general education system, requires students to complete a “western civilization” requirement.<sup>75</sup> However, some have recently called into question the necessity and overall benefit of an education system based on “western civilization,” sparking a debate. Changes to syllabi and curriculum of certain humanity courses are not met with acceptance by all members of academia. For instance, Reed College in Portland, Oregon, faced intense backlash from academia, and notably the *Wall Street Journal*, following course changes that were prompted by student led demonstrations calling for a less “white Eurocentric” curriculum.<sup>76</sup> Reed College decided to update their course, ‘Introduction to the Humanities: Greece and the Ancient Mediterranean,’ to include the histories of people of color and non-Western nations. The critics of Reed College’s decision argue that modern views are confusing current definitions of race with that of antiquity.

## **Conclusion**

Within the field of Classics, scholars often disagree on how to approach and instruct the Classics in a postcolonial world. Shifting views within the field of Classics coincides directly with changing world and societal opinions. Up until the mid-twentieth

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<sup>75</sup>State University of New York at New Paltz, “General Education Requirements,” *Undergraduate Catalog*, accessed May 4, 2019, <https://www.newpaltz.edu/ugc/ge.html>.

<sup>76</sup> Colleen Flaherty, “Diversifying a Classic Humanities Course,” *Inside Higher Ed*, April 12, 2018, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/04/12/responding-student-criticism-its-foundational-humanities-course-too-white-reed>.

century, scholars of classical studies held the opinion that the Romans were merely engaging in defensive imperialism.<sup>77</sup> Some believe there is still a great deal that ancient sources have to offer for a further understanding. Eric Adler discussed this changing idea at length in his book, *Valorizing the Barbarians: Enemy Speeches in Roman Historiography*. Adler sought to prove that ancient authors could be critics of Roman imperialism and society. While others, such as Edward Said, best known for his work, *Orientalism*, believe the best approach is to discredit the reliability of the works of ancient and Western thinkers. Said noted, “It is therefore correct that every European, in what he could say about the Orient, was consequently a racist, an imperialist, and almost totally ethnocentric.”<sup>78</sup>

Furthermore, some scholars urge that the behavior of white supremacists of the twenty first century are not unprecedented, but rather these actions are to be expected from white Americans. Historian Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz argues in her article, “What White Supremacists Know,” that white supremacists have been instructed on how to combat their own supposed barbarians of today, including Muslims in the post-9/11 era, by United States’ past treatment towards those labelled as “savages who are threats to civilization,” such as indigenous peoples of the Americas.<sup>79</sup>

The white supremacists’ actions in the twenty-first century mirror the behavior of white Anglo-Saxon Americans at the turn of the twentieth century. There are startling similarities between the two groups. Both groups experienced a heightened sense of fear and paranoia due to changing demographics and threat of race suicide. Additionally,

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<sup>77</sup> Eric Adler, *Valorizing the Barbarians: Enemy Speeches in Roman Historiography*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012), 2-3.

<sup>78</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

<sup>79</sup> Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, “What White Supremacists Know,” *Utne Reader*, Spring 2019, 52.

these groups grossly misused works from Greco-Roman antiquity to support their false claims. The writings of race theorists from centuries before has prompted a cycle of misinformation amongst people who aim to incite violence and spew hate. It is imperative to prevent fear mongering tactics from dictating how the United States government makes decisions regarding immigration and race relations. Now is the time for classicists and policy makers to act as advocates for the truth against the growing tide of hate groups in the United States. Through the spread of correct information, hate groups will lose their position and sense of authority, and truth will shine light in this darkness.

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