Spring 2017

The Sin of Skin: Color and 'Other' in the Greco-Roman World

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Classical Studies and Sociology Senior Thesis
Advisors: Gary Reger and Johnny Williams
Spring, 2017

ABSTRACT

Many Scholars have denied the presence of racial categorizing in European Antiquity. Though there was no institutionalized system of 'racial oppression' like we are familiar with in today's society, I contend that there are cultural precursors of 'race' in the Greco-Roman world, otherwise known as 'proto-race'. All societies have means to categorize people and put them into hierarchies - this is a major focus in the field of sociology. I propose that color-symbolic language was used to make distinctions amongst and between people; further that by analyzing the context within which these 'color-words' were referenced, it illuminates the importance of ethnic differentiation in the Greco-Roman world that became a veneer for 'race' as we understand it today. This paper is an exploration of early ethnic prejudice that uses both a symbolic interactionist perspective, as well as Michel Foucault's conceptual framework of language as a vehicle for power, in order to analyze the color-symbolic language used in classical texts and the meaning that develops out of it.

In memory of my Aunt Kit, who taught me the importance of knowledge, friendship, and love.

"Υπάρχει μόνο ένα αγαθό, γνώση, και ένα κακό,άγνοια.." - Σωκράτης

"The only good is knowledge, and the only evil is ignorance." - Socrates

AKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my deepest gratitude to both of my brilliant advisors, Professor Williams and Professor Reger, for the countless ways that they each have improved my life. Without your constant guidance and support throughout this process, none of this would have been possible.

Professor Reger, since my freshman year you have been a pillar of strength for me, both inside and outside of the classroom. Your continual and convincing spirit of adventure in regard to research and scholarship was what first opened my eyes to the magic that is the Greek and Mediterranean world. Your sincerity and kindness in recognizing my potential, as well as my shortcomings, allowed me to grow as both a person and a student and for that I am eternally grateful.

Professor Williams, I will forever be inspired by you. I entered your classroom, albeit intimidated, and your promptly told us that "you get what you earn, not what you deserve". Your unapologetic dedication to true *teaching*, as well as your honesty with me, has forever altered the way I view the world. It is impossible to properly articulate my admiration for both your work and your spirit, but I thank you from the bottom of my heart for pushing me to hold true to my beliefs.

Simply put, thank you to both of you for helping me grow into the best version of myself.

I also wish to thank both the Classics and Sociology departments at large – Seabury feels like a second home to me now. A special thank you to Dr. Anderrson; your strength and encouragement allowed me to find my place at Trinity.

Thank you to my friends and family for your unwavering support and love. To my dad, for reminding me that school isn't about grades, it's about what you truly learn that counts. To my mom, for being my number one fan. To my grandma, for your endless love. To my dearest friend Warren, for every long day and night in Raether library, thank you for always keeping me laughing, even when I thought I was going to lose the plot.

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INTRODUCTION

"It is not the presence of an objective physical difference between groups that creates races, but the social recognition of such differences as socially significant or relevant."

If life were a card game, chameleons would have the winning hand. Known for their ability to blend into all environments, this animal possesses the unique ability to change skin color at any moment. Upon feeling threatened by a potential predator, for example, they will change colors in order to blend into the surrounding environment. Their ability to biologically camouflage rests on the premise that their lives are at greater risk when standing out. While a chameleon can go from being brown, to green, or even speckled, it is still undoubtedly a chameleon. Imagine that. Humans unfortunately do not possess the same biological ability to transform their skin. Aside from spray tans or skin bleaching kits, we must go through life wearing the very skin into which we are born. Our skin pigmentation is permanent. In a figurative sense, chameleons serve as a metaphor for the larger point of this thesis in that their transformative abilities suggest that the pigmentation of human skin does not signify the existence of biological distinction among humans. A red chameleon is no different from a blue chameleon in its value as a lizard, just as a 'brown human' is no different from a 'white' human in his or her value as a human. While chameleons are flexible in their presentation of their exterior selves, human beings are fairly limited. Recognizing the limited nature of phenotypical variations requires a comprehensive understanding of structural boundaries drawn and secured throughout history that appraise individual's based on the color of their skin. To

this end, I investigate the proto origins of the idea of 'race' in European antiquity which evolved into a coherent system of meanings that helps to create and sustain racial oppression.

A tremendous deal of research has been done in the field of sociology on the concept of 'race'. Similarly, in the field of Classics, scholars have dedicated studies to the subject of ethnicity. There is some irony in this however, it being that 'race' and 'ethnicity' are by definition completely separate yet a compilation of this idea reveals that there is actually overlap that is worth noting. As a discipline, sociology involves the study of social, political, and economic developments that emerge over time. Sociology investigates the organizational structure of society and the ways in which social dynamics within them are constructed, maintained, and dismantled. Classical Studies appears to cover an entirely separate realm of academia that covers the earliest branch of the humanities. Classics encompasses the languages, literature, history, art, as well as a variety of other cultural aspects that developed in and came to characterize the Ancient Mediterranean world. The thread that sews these two seemingly contrasting disciplines together is the central focus on the development of culture, what it means, and its relationship to the organization of society in respect to politics, economics, and social change. Though the amount of time separating each discipline's focus in history is vast, one must ask the question, if sociology is the study of evolving social dynamics in society, then can scholarly research done in the field of Classics truly be disregarded? Further, can the sociological framework that has been developed not be applied to the classical world?

Taken at face value, both sociology and Classical Studies examine patterns and social relations in society.

Prejudice towards particular racial and ethnic groups, as well as xenophobia, are forms of hostility towards foreigners and strangers both at home and abroad. These beliefs are powerful and are fluid in the degree and form to which they appear across various societies. Prejudice derives from an inherent human tendency to classify and label others so that we can come to understand those who do not appear to resemble someone like our own self. While these tendencies are not discriminatory in theory, in practice, there are and continue to be problematic consequences when people attempt to reduce anything complex into simplistic generalization. 'Race' then, in the twentieth century demands a more in depth analysis of how this social construction was created and how it materializes. It did not just appear out of nowhere. I ask the reader to move away from preconceived notions of human difference. 'Race' scholars and many sociological studies have done extensive work on 'race' as it is understood in a modern context. However, few have dissected 'race' as a phenomenon that has roots in the ancient Greco-Roman world. In this thesis, I explore the intellectual origins of racial classification otherwise known as proto-racism.

A holistic understanding of 'race' requires an investigation into the social meanings that have been imposed on the varying human populations. Audrey Smedley's work argues that the elements currently constructing 'race' have been used "since the eighteenth century as a mechanism to stratify society and to accord privileges, benefits, and rights to some and not to others, which the justification that the groups called 'races'

are innately unequal and that their differences cannot be transcended"[1]. I wish to expand upon this point in order to show how the boundary-making and barrier-inducing force that is 'race,' intended to be a divisive and restricting phenomenon, extends back in time before the eighteenth century but in a proto-racist way that is aligned with ethnic identity.

The concept of ethnicity is ambiguous and therefore in order to use the term, it must be defined. The Greeks and Romans had multiple words that designated what would commonly be understood today as an ethnic group: *ethnos, genos, phylon,* and sometimes *laos* in Greek, and in Latin, *genus or natio*[2]. There isn't any noticeable overlap or consistency in the use of these terms that allows for a clear distinction to be made between them. *Ethos* for example, did not have a singular meeting. It could be used to signal "people" or "nation", and the Greeks also applied it to a "loose social and political organization contrasting with the classical *polis*"[3]. The term *ethos*, as demonstrated, has tremendous fluidity. Despite this, and the fact that there was no specific term to denote ethnicity, it is still possible to employ the concept when investigating the perceptions and attitudes held by people in the ancient world.

In circumstances where different ethnic groups come into contact, Frederik Barth's work considers this an instance of "ethnic interdependency"[4]. Donald Horowitz, also intrigued by the process of the creation of an ethnic identity, emphasized its ascriptive

[1] Smedley, Audrey. Race in North America: Origin and Evolution of a Worldview. XII.

[2] Gruen, Eric. *Did Ancient Identity Depend on Ethnicity? A Preliminary Probe*. 1.

[3] Gruen, Eric. *Did Ancient Identity Depend on Ethnicity? A Preliminary Probe*. 1.

[4] Fredrik Barth. *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*. 11.

nature, and also that it contracts and expands in accordance with established boundaries. These marked boundaries, according to Barth, are "those features that separate one ethnic group from all others and establishes the interface where the groups meet and separate"[5]. This rendezvous between distinct peoples then, is where identity can be challenged, changed, or sharpened. This results from a cultural exchange process that creates either a hybrid of the two, or a power dynamic where one dominates the other.

It is important to distinguish between cultural ethnicity and biological ethnicity, as common descent does not necessarily imply having the same customs, beliefs, languages, or religion. To complicate the notion of ethnicity further does not seem relevant to the question at hand, as the Greek and Romans consistently expressed a sense of community that was derived from descent, "through a common ancestor, through the bloodline, through shared origins, whether real or fictitious"[6]. Ethnicity then, is a critical mode of self-understanding, as it was the mechanism by which the Greek and Romans developed a collective conscious.

"Race signifies rigidity and permanence of position and status within a ranking order that is based on what is believed to be an unalterable reality of innate biological differences. Ethnicity is conditional, temporal, even volitional, and not amenable to biology or a biological process"[7]. 'Ethnicity' can thus be understood as distinct from 'race' in that it references a collection of people who share cultural ties, such as language, dress, customs, beliefs, food, etc. In other words, 'ethnicity' is a term for cultural difference

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[5] Fredrik Barth. *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*. 13.

[6] Gruen, Eric. *Did Ancient Identity Depend on Ethnicity? A Preliminary Probe*. 2.

[7] Smedley, Audrey. Race in North America: Origin and Evolution. 34.

because it implies a group construction that is oriented around social ties and varies across cultures. I use the term proto-racism because in light of the modern definition of 'race', this dynamic did not exist in European Antiquity. However, the term envelopes a combined meaning that points to how ethnic prejudice set the stage for 'race' and action/praxis structure, racism.

Smedley presents an argument that the Greek and Romans conceived of differences in language and custom as more significant than differences in appearance of physical traits. Pointing to Herodotus, she argues that while there are many statements which appear to be "racist", in reality they simply demonstrate how the ancients perceived "barbarians" as peoples on the outskirts of civilization, but those who could learn the language and culture of the ruling group and eventually become an 'insider'. In this way, 'insider-ship' became a critical locus of identity, which was ultimately the determining factor for one's rights and responsibilities within society. For example, the right to participate in the Olympic Games was a marker of 'Greekness'. According to Herodotus, the Olympics admitted all Greeks 'equally'; the corollary of this, that it excluded all non-Greeks[8]. Festivals with games, as this one at Olympia, represented a sense of a common ethnicity through an "appreciation of a patriotic duty to defend the freedom of Hellas"[9]. In essence, this 'middle ground' became a space "where ethnic boundaries were protected and strengthened precisely by figuring out ways to interact without contamination"[10].

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[8] Kyle, Donald. *Pan-Hellenism and Particularism: Herodotus on Sport, Greekness, Piety and War.* 185.
[9] Kyle, Donald. *Pan-Hellenism and Particularism: Herodotus on Sport, Greekness, Piety and War.* 183.
[10] Reger, Gary. *Ethnic Identities, Borderlands, and Hybridity.* 120.

As previously stated, Herodotus' account of the Olympic Games was that in order to participate, one had to be 'Greek'. The ambiguity of this qualification is resonant of the debate that surrounded it, then and now. The Greeks "congregating at Olympia to take part in the games or watch them came not only from Greece proper but from the Euxine colonies, the cities of Asia Minor, the African coast, Greater Greece, the father settlements in the Western Mediterranean, in fact from every place where the Hellenes were found"[11]. Thus, Alexander I, King of Macedonia, appearing at the 71st Olympiad in 496 B.C. to profess his desire to participate was undoubtedly a moment that we can look at in order to clarify what Herodotus meant by the term "Greek". As no foreign participants were allowed, Alexander, the King of a foreign land, needed to justify his right to race, which according to Herodotus he did by publicly indicating his Hellenic origin and consequently denouncing any notion that he was a 'barbarian'. According to his account, Alexander publicly announced to the assembled company why he qualified to participate in the Games[12]. By "preferring to speak, explaining his Argead tradition, instead of relying on their judgment shows not his need of supporting his Hellenic identity but his pride in proclaiming his descent from Zeus and Heracles"[13]. By asserting his Hellenic nobility through the Heracleid kings of Macedonia, the royal house would have consequently been recognized as Greek and "sprung from the Argos in the Peloponnese," which in turn anointed the Macedonians, indirectly, a natural place in the

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[11] Daskalakēs, Ap V. *The Hellenism of the ancient Macedonians.* 161.

[12] Herodotus. *Histoires.* 5.22

[13] Daskalakēs, Ap V. *The Hellenism of the ancient Macedonians.* 165.

Pan-Hellenic world[14]. In this way, the "Greek identity" welcomed the entrance of those who could prove their ancestry but also those who, by association, exhibited cultural Greek consciousness, in this case the Macedonian people – through language and traditions, specifically here, the Olympic Games. While there is debate over the accuracy of Herodotus' account, nonetheless it encompasses a complication of the notion of Greek identity. The Macedonians were able to "activate" their 'Greekness' in a way that implied to be Greek, no longer implied a race, "but an intellectual capacity, and those that are called 'Greeks' share our culture rather than our common blood"[15]. In other words, the Macedonians, through Alexander's participation in the Greek games, were showing a conscious effort in their political and diplomatic interactions to pass as Greek.

The process of negotiating identity was not an easy one. There are two ways to understand identity then: "a version that finds Greek identity in culture, so that (rather like Roman identity) anyone can acquire it with the right training, and a version that rooted Greek identity in ethnicity, in "being Greek" – a version closed to anyone not descended from the Greeks of the past, no matter how thorough his master of language and culture."[16]. Thus begins my exploration of the fluidity of identity and the process by which it was constructed and negotiated both individually and collectively in the Greco-Roman world. In essence, an investigation into the welter of ethnicities, languages, and

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[14] Herodotus. *Histoires*. 5.22.
[15] Isocrates. *Panegyricus.* 50.
[16] Reger, Gary. *Multiple Identities in the Elites of Roman Asia Minor,* unpublished paper (2008).; Romeo, Ilario. *The Panhellenion and Ethnic Identity in Hadrianic Greece.* 21-40.

traditions that existed, reveals how these non-essentialist 'ethnic' practices became mechanisms, or proto-types, for the modern apogee of essentialist 'racial' categories.

I propose that color-symbolic language was used to make distinctions amongst and between people; further that by analyzing the context within which these 'color-words' were referenced, it illuminates the importance of ethnic differentiation in the Greco-Roman world that became a veneer for 'race' as we understand it today.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This thesis will use both the theory of symbolic interactionism, as well as the conceptual framework put forth by Foucault, to explore how folks during European antiquity attached meaning to skin and for what end. The primary concern of symbolic interaction theorizing is to understand the process whereby individuals define situations. Language is a collection of symbols; letters made into words, and words strung into sentences. As such, naming and its intended meaning are the mechanisms with which individuals perceive, understand, and react to their surroundings. It is through shared understanding of reality that society is able to function. In this way, modern society's notion of 'race' is symbolic of a 'knowledge system,' a way of knowing, perceiving, interpreting and rationalizing difference among human beings.

Dan E. Miller outlines the origin and claims of Symbolic Interactionism in his piece, "Toward a Theory of Interaction". He advocates for Manford Kuhn, who argued "that human behavior was exemplified by extreme variability; that humans were highly creative; that people continued to learn and modify their behavior in accordance; and that humans, through feedback control, were able to continually adjust and regulate their behavior without conditioned learning;" and thus, symbolic interactionism was the only viable and logical approach for studying "complex patterns of self-perception and situated identity"[17]. George Hubert Mead, who laid the principles of symbolic interactionism, noted that:

> Selves can exist only in definite relationships to other selves. No hard and fast line can be drawn between our own selves and the selves of others… The individual

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[17] Miller, Dan. *Toward a Theory of Symbolic Interaction: The Iowa School.* 341.

possesses a self only in relation to the selves of the other members of his social group; and the structure of his self expresses or reflects the general behavior pattern of this social group to which he belongs[18].

In essence then, the primary concern of symbolic interactionism is to understand how we come to define situations in relation to others and our surrounding environment.

Emile Durkheim studied the ways in which individuals are regulated and integrated in society. In other words, he analyzed the elements that contribute to the formation of one's character, which is social in nature. In his work, Durkheim defined social facts as "a category of facts which present very special characteristics: they consist of manners of acting, thinking, and feeling external to the individual, which are invested with a coercive power by virtue of which they exercise control over him"[19]. They are the norms, values, and customs, or 'unwritten rules' of society that shape the way individuals behave. In this way, an individual's unique perspective, or knowledge, is a product of their membership to a particular group or environment. The process through which individuals take on social facts as their own is known as interpellation.

Introduced by French philosopher Louis Althusser, interpellation reveals that cultural values are internalized because they are presented as an already-accepted attitude aligned with those in power and thus the individual takes them on as their own. Defining ideology as "the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence,"[20] Althusser suggests that ideologies function as mediators between systems of power and individuals. The ideology of race for example, works in this

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[18] Mead, George Hubert. *Mind, Self, and Society*. 343.
[19] Durkheim, Emile. The Rules of Sociological Method. 52.
[20] Althusser, Louis. Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses. 162.

way to place individuals in a particular position. As a social process, race has become so commonly accepted as an immutable biological-fact that those who question its reality or choose not to identify with their assigned group, are going against the accepted logic of society. In this way the map precedes the territory. Individuals are forced to draw from the tools they have been given, language in this case, to interpret their reality.

An analysis of the multiform nature of language is reflective of the distinct cultural vocabularies that exist in each respective habitus. Understanding the history of color language, particularly black and white, reveals subtle nuances within the association of literal pigments with more complex symbolism and meaning. The English word 'white' for example, is not uniform in its definition when compared to other languages. Inuit people have seven words for white, whereas in India, Sanskrit texts show that there were important distinctions made between the whiteness of a tooth, cow's milk, pearls, a ray of light, and even the whiteness of an autumnal mood compared to an autumnal cloud[21]. In Japanese, there are six different terms used to induce whiteness and these are distinguished not only through a pigment's shine or matte but also by the energy of the color[22]. In this way the 'Truth' can be understood as relative, or not absolute, based on the premise that individuals see the world through a particular lens.

Michel Foucault's work elaborates on the power of language in the production and reproduction of knowledge. Society is constantly evolving and during this process the mechanism necessary for constructing knowledge, language, is in a constant state of

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[21] Varichon, Anne, and Toula Ballas. Colors: What They Mean and How to Make Them. 43.

[22] Varichon, Anne, and Toula Ballas. Colors: What They Mean and How to Make Them.

change. Human beings are both the subjects and the objects. This 'knowledge' is relative

though, because it is always correlated with, and dependent on, an individual's particular

social environment. In light of this, Foucault argues that language is interrelated with the

force of power because it consists of pre-existing knowledge. Thus, seemingly neutral

words are in impregnated with meaning. In *Power as Knowledge,* he writes that "power is

everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere…

it is not an institution, and not a structure; *it is the name* that one attributes to a complex

strategical situation in a particular society."[23] This makes human beings vehicles that

simultaneously "undergo and exercise"[24] this power through communication. Individuals

"are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its

articulation"[25]. Armed with a vocabulary, humans use this tool in order to construct and

convey their thoughts.

     Michel Foucault builds on Althusser's framework of interpellation, and his

emphasis on the circulatory relationship between subjectivity and exterior structures, as

both of them suggest that subjectivity is constructed through discourse[26]. Like Althusser,

Foucault asserts that "subjecthood has a duality: it both subjugates individuals as passive

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[23] Foucault, Michel. "Power as Knowledge." *Social Theory: The Multicultural, Global, and Classic Readings*. 353.

[24] Foucault, Michel. "Power as Knowledge." *Social Theory: The Multicultural, Global, and Classic Readings*. 219.

[25] Foucault, Michel. "Power as Knowledge." *Social Theory: The Multicultural, Global, and Classic Readings*. 218.

[26] Foucault, Michel. The History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction.*;* Althusser, Louis. *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses.*

beings involuntarily defined under the scope of scientific discourse but it also simultaneously, and counter-intuitively, creates the potential for autonomy and resistance by mobilizing around these new identities"[27]. In essence, both recognize that human beings are social subjects who act as recipients of knowledge. In light of Durkheim's work, which suggests that there are 'social facts' which shape individuals, Foucault would suggest that there is nothing finite about these 'facts', as there is no such thing as a universal Truth, capital 'T'. Further, while Durkheim celebrates 'social bonds', Foucault finds them intrinsically problematic. Durkheim understood that social facts were historically situated, however, he still saw them as finite facts; whereas Foucault would argue that nothing can be defined without language, and language in itself it impregnated with power-dynamics that in themselves are not objective.

While these schools of thought do not necessarily agree with one another, Althusser, Durkheim, and Foucault all suggest that discipline comes from outside and is then imposed from within. In other words, interaction provides us with a way to understand both ourselves and others, and the social facts that we utilize in this interaction, shaking hands for example, come from a conditioned knowledge of this 'mechanism' as the necessary component for socialization, and in itself that seemingly neutral action is embedded with a deeper history or meaning that guides it. These insights are key to my approach on color discourse in the Greek and Roman world. To understand color as a social fact is to view it as something devoid of any cultural context.

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[27] "The Chicago School of Media Theory Theorizing Media since 2003." *The Chicago School of Media Theory.*

As nothing can be understood devoid of social interaction, color too must not be viewed as 'neutral' or distinct from perception. To define a 'thing' as 'white' or 'black' is not arbitrary but it is to assign it a more complex meaning. Thus, the use of these words, 'white' and 'black' must not be viewed neutrally. Rather these words must be examined within the context they are being used, as well as in relation to the potential implications of their intended or unintended meaning.

In light of this, color will be a central focal point of this thesis. Color, defined in this thesis, is something that falls within the ROY-G-BIV scale. This acronym stands for the red-orange-yellow-green-blue-indigo-violet sequence of hues that make up a rainbow. From an ethnocentric viewpoint, these categories are fairly concrete. There are variations, light purple, dark blue, neon yellow, hunter green, and forth, but each of them exists in relation to the other and as some version of one of the standard choices. Color is contingent on the cultural context in which one is situated in. In ancient Egypt, *wadjet* is a word that covers a range of blue, blue-green, and green[28]. It is fluid in the way that Egyptians applied it opposed to what a Western-English speaking individual might view as three distinct colors. Every language has a set of words to describe and differentiate between colors then. In light of this, there can be no universal 'truth' with a capital T way of defining the meaning behind a particular hue, as it is all relative. The 'social facts' of one cultural habitus cannot be viewed as 'True' knowledge because when they are

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[28] Bradley, Mark. Colour and Meaning in Ancient Rome. 121.

situated within a larger context, there will undoubtedly be variations in how others perceive and define that same 'thing'[29].

In the field of sociology, oppression is typically conceptualized as the relationship between categories of people, whereby one dominant player benefits from systematically exploiting and governing over another, who is deemed subordinate. The exploitation of people and land in the name of expansion and acquisition of resources laid the groundwork for the development of a relationship characterized by the dynamic of a conqueror and the conquered[30]. In consideration of the aforementioned theories and theorists, the dualism of a governed and a governor is worthy of analysis. In order for this to materialize, a framework for classification needed to develop. This process was facilitated by proto-racial categorization of people into social systems of power relations that evolved into a system of racial oppression with a program of exploitation and domination that maintained the conquerors/oppressor's wealth, power, and advantages. There exist no direct link between 'race,' 'racial prejudice,' and 'racism' to antiquity, as these are modern definitions, however through an analysis of other elements of identity classification, namely ethnicity and civic identity, it becomes possible to suss out precursive aspects of contemporary notions of 'race'.

Words carry meaning but they simultaneously condense complex things into oversimplified terms. Definition of the situation is thus a mechanism for maintaining or achieving power because it can be used by individuals to alter and shape another's

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[29] Durkheim, Emile. The Rules of Sociological Method. 53.
[30] Feagin, Joe. Systemic Racism. 10.

perception so that it aligns with their own. In the context of 'race,' by defining someone

by the color of their skin, that definition becomes a tangible identity from which

interactions are constituted. Further, that very label has surfaced from a historical context

that had previously secured a definite relationship between a particular racial category

and its associated meaning. Put simply, to accept language and its inferred knowledge as

a universal truth is to mistake the conditions one finds themselves in to be universal,

when they are not. It is to mistake contingency for necessity. What then is the function of

the meaning behind one's assignment to an identity group? Who does it serve? How did

it materialize?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholars have denied the presence of racial categorizing in European Antiquity. Though there was no institutionalized system of 'racial oppression' like we are familiar with in today's society, I contend that there are cultural precursors of 'race' in the Greco-Roman world. In the spectrum of scholastic research that examines 'race', 'ethnicity', and the construction of an 'other' in Ancient Greece and Rome, the outstanding work comes from Frank Snowden Jr., Jonathan Hall, Erich Gruen, and Benjamin Isaac.

Frank Snowden Jr. determined that there was no racism in the ancient world and that "the onus of intense color prejudice cannot be placed upon the shoulders of the ancients"[31]. In "Some Greek and Roman Observations on the Ethiopian" he suggests, for example, that "the Greeks and Romans attached no special stigma to color," and that it was a "mere geographical accident"[32]. One example that he cited to show this is found in a description given by Asclepiades who says: "Gazing at her beauty I melt like wax before the fire. And if she is black (Μέλαινα) what difference to me? So are coals but when we light them, they shine like rose-buds."[33] From his perspective, despite that the ancients used color symbolism which equated black with evil, sin, and darkness, and white with purity, goodness, and light, intermarriage wasn't uncommon and thus, there was no claim to white superiority. In my opinion, Snowden ignores the subtle dynamic being presented here, which is that Asclepiades feels compelled to explain, to justify even, his sexual

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[31] Snowden, Frank M. Jr. *Before Color Prejudice: The Ancient Views of Blacks.* 108.

[32] Snowden, Frank M. , Jr. . Some Greek and Roman Observations on the Ethiopian. 27.

[33] Asclepiades. *Anthologia.* 5.210.

attraction to a black woman. While this attraction may have been shared, or commonplace, nonetheless this statement implies that this woman - because of her dark complexion - must be excused in some way and the inference from his statement 'what difference to me?' is that while he does not see a problem, others might note their difference as problematic or strange.

In his book, "The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity," Benjamin Isaac argues that there was racism in the ancient world. Isaac's systematic analysis of ancient social prejudices and stereotypes reveals that there were early forms of racism, called proto-racism, and that this served as a pillar, or a prototype, for modern racism to develop in the eighteenth century[34]. He reveals that the ancient Greeks and Romans possessed nationalistic tendencies, which provided a foundation for the concomitant integration or non-integration of foreigners. Further, he shows that there is a demonstrable connection between the views Greeks and Romans held of foreign peoples and their ideology of imperial expansion; to this he writes: "In order to understand how empires functioned or disintegrated, it is helpful to understand the attitudes of the integrated people"[35]. When peoples were conquered, incorporated into provinces and, in due course of time, became part of an integrated empire, this entailed a process of ethnic disintegration or decomposition. Isaac concerns himself not so much with how the Greeks and Romans acted towards others, though this is still important to take note of, but rather he considers how they thought and wrote about them. It is only through an

[34] Isaac, Benjamin. The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity. 12.
[35] Isaac, Benjamin. The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity. 10.

attempt to interpret these ancient texts properly that we can begin to understand what these authors were trying to convey, what they did convey, or what was conveyed, even if that wasn't necessarily the intention. He refutes the claim put forth by other classical scholars such as Eric Gruen and Frank Snowden, who suggest that the ancient Greeks and Romans harbored prejudice that was "ethnic and cultural", rather than racial.

Jonathan Hall, a leading classical scholar on ethnic identity in antiquity, argues that the 'ethnic' groups of ancient Greece, were not racial, linguistic, religious, or cultural, but rather they were social groups whose origins were just as imagined as they were 'real'. He elucidates the nature of ethnic identity in Ancient Greece from an anthropological perspective and suggests that Greek ethnic groups were not a product of natural or essential entities, but instead emphasizes the active and constructive role of material culture and language in shaping ethnic consciousness. Hall notes that "it is not the physical traits that enter into ethnicity but rather the attitude adopted toward them," but rather, "it must be the myth of shared of shared descent which ranks paramount among the features that distinguish ethnic from other social groups"[36]. In essence then, Hall's account takes on the position that "kinship, like language or social conventions, enters into the formation of ethnicity when it is articulated in the context of ethicizing discourse"[37]. Hall outlines well the context from which ethnic identity emerged from family trees, however his work must be expanded upon in order to analyze the repertoire

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[36] Hall, Jonathan H. Ethnic Identity in Greek Identity. 25.

[37] Konstan, David. *Defining Ancient Greek Ethnicity*. 100.

of strategies that emerged alongside kinship, namely cultural forms of identification that entered into the construction of Greek ethnicity.

Erich Gruen builds off of the notion that the Greeks and Romans elevated their own self-perception by contrasting themselves with a negative distortion of an 'other', namely, Egyptians and Ethiopians, and instead presents an argument which suggests that the ancients expressed admiration for the principles and achievements of other peoples. His work demonstrates that the Greeks and Romans incorporated 'alien' traditions into their own cultural caricature in a way that was positive and based on admiration. In essence, Gruen suggests that while there were cultural differences, they were viewed as positive characteristics that the Romans and Greeks believed would benefit them.

Ethnic differentiation has no absolute boundaries, yet within the boundaries of the Greek world, the term *barbaroi* was used. Edith Hall's work explains that the label "'*the Hellenes'* is customarily used to designate the whole Greek-speaking world from Sicily to the Black Sea… it was then and only then that *the barbarians* could come to mean the entire remainder of the human race"[38]. The term *Barbaroi* was thus used to reference anyone who was considered "non-Greek" and in this way, Hall emphasizes the construction of an absolute 'other'. In light of this, it is crucial to expand upon Stuart Hall's conception of ethnicity, which states that it is constituted by criteria of descent and homeland. Rather, "ethnicity, however circumstantial, instrumental, or national, does not write its primordial past arbitrarily"[39]; but it comes as a response or recognition of a 'we'

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[38] Hall, Edith. Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-Definition Through Tragedy. 11.
[39] Malkin, Irad. *Ancient Perceptions of Greek Ethnicity.* 16.

identity that encompasses many, though broad, "culturally based collective identities that include indigenous groups…. Groups based primarily on religion, language, political organization, racial categorizations; groups formerly regarded as 'nations', 'tribes', 'minorities', 'cultures', 'racial groups', and/or 'religious groups"[40].

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[40] Jones, Sian. *The Archaeology of Ethnicity.* 117.

METHODOLOGY

In my thesis, I use a close-reading of texts to explore how interactions between two distinct people laid the foundational elements - embedded in the sub conscious - that allowed for the dynamic of 'us and them' to be heightened.

A case study refers to both a method of analysis and a specific research design for examining a problem, both of which are used in most circumstances to generalize across populations. A case study research paper examines a person, place, event, phenomenon, or other type of subject of analysis in order to extrapolate key themes and results that help predict future trends, illuminate previously hidden issues that can be applied to practice, and/or provide a means for understanding an important research problem with greater clarity. A case study paper usually examines a single subject of analysis, but case study papers can also be designed as a comparative investigation that shows relationships between two or among more than two subjects.

A case study encompasses a problem contextualized around the application of in-depth analysis, interpretation, and discussion, often resulting in specific recommendations for action or for improving existing conditions. This is a case study of the aforementioned "texts" produced by Greek and Roman scholars that seeks to understand the roots of racial prejudice and the process of how it was socially constructed as an ideology in order to divulge a solution to its inherent problem.

Social construction is taught using exercises on the logic of categories and how perceptions are shaped. By deconstructing classical texts and analyzing the cross-cultural and historical variations of 'racial' categories and classification practices referenced

within them, my goal is to show how 'race' has materialized out of a proto-racial framework conceived in the Greco-Roman world. Moreover, while it was not discussed in a systematic way - not institutionalized - that the meaning which was attached to phenotypical differences became ingrained in the subconscious and thus it evolved into a proto-type of race. In this way, this early form of human classification became the necessary ingredient, or veneer of an "us" vs. "them" dichotomy.

I will be conducting a secondary data analysis of existing work in the classics in order to deduce whether or not there was a proto-racial foundation that existed in the Greco-Roman world. I will use a qualitative methodology in order to examine four main texts such as *The Lausiac History*, The *Apophthegmata Patrum*, Herodotus' *Histories*, Hippocrates *Airs, Waters and Places*, as well as various other sources, in an attempt to fill a gap that exists in the study of early ethnic prejudice and its relationship to 'race' and 'racism'.

I will use the symbolic interactionist perspective, as well as Foucault's conceptual framework of language as a vehicle for power, in order to analyze discourse and the meaning that develops out of it. Humans are social in nature and thus knowledge is the product of interaction. In this way, this 'knowledge' must be examined in light of the context within which it is being produced.

THE GREEK AND ROMAN MOLD

What is 'race'?

Individual humans differ from one another and that is an undeniable truth. Black, white, and brown are merely skin colors, matters of pigmentation, however society has attached meanings, assumptions, and laws to these phenotypic variations. Constructed as a way to classify the perceived biological, social and cultural differences between human groups, 'race' as an ideology assumes that simple external differences such as visual markers of skin color, hair texture, eye shape, etc., which are rooted in biology, are linked to more complex internal differences, such as athletic ability, musical aptitude, and intelligence. Advancement in the field of genomics reveals, however, that there are no genetic markers which define race and in fact, DNA findings show that there are no consistent variations within and across different 'racial' categories[41]. Humans actually have more genetic similarity than almost all other living species on the planet; fruit flies for example, have ten times more genetic difference than humans[42]. A comparison of any two fruit flies demonstrates that the genetic difference between them can be as significant as the comparison of a human and a chimpanzee's DNA[43]. In light of this, understanding race as a myth requires a total paramount shift in thought, as it has become the singular lens through which society sees the world.

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[41] Herbes-Sommers, Christine. Race -- The Power of an Illusion: The Difference Between Us. 2005.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid.

The foundation of race rests on an essentialist argument which presents these groups, white, black, and brown, as unequal by nature, and thus, they become pegs on a hierarchal ladder. Race as a worldview is then a composition of particular ideological elements and these ideologies are organized by sets of beliefs, values, and assumptions, held together by faith in a system that prescribes guidelines for both individual and group behavior. It is a social choice to elevate skin color above other physical features that could potentially be used as markers of difference in a social hierarchy. There are indisputable biological differences between the two sexes: women can bear children, men can't. So the social categorization of men and women that devalues women in many spheres can be "justified" by pointing to real differences, even though in fact those prejudices are not based on the actual results of the biological difference. All human beings have approximately the same thirty-thousand genes, but over time mutations have developed - namely in the genes that control skin pigmentation[44]. In a few genes that control the colors of melanin, the different alleles, mutations that are positively selected in those with very light skin lost the capacity to make dark melanin[45]. Lighter melanin is found where sunlight is less intense. Sunlight is essential to develop adequate active vitamin D and humans need to have adequate Vitamin D and thus, they need to have the ability to absorb it in order to stay healthy. If we were to only compare a group of people in Norway, with a group of people in the Tropics, we would see distinct looking groups of people. But, if you were to walk from Norway to the Tropics, there would never be a time

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[44] Herbes-Sommers, Christine. Race -- The Power of an Illusion: The Difference Between Us. 2005.
[45] Herbes-Sommers, Christine. Race -- The Power of an Illusion: The Difference Between Us. 2005.

or place when someone would be able to say 'oh this is where we go from white to black'
or vice versa. There can be accumulations of some genes in one place or another, such as
the gene forms regulating skin color[46]. Race does not account for patterns of genetic
variation but the ways that we have moved and mated as a species, does[47]. Variation in
some traits, like eye shape or hair form, involves limited genes. Variations in traits we
regard as socially important, such as athletic ability and musical aptitude, are very
different. Therefore, while there is no similar justification that can be made about skin
color, as is made about the sexes, the minute mutations in alleles are exploited and
powerfully deployed as a social marker based on geographical descent.

Today, race is understood as the major mode for social differentiation above
factors such as occupation, gender, age, culture, and religion; thus, it must be taken as a
sociocultural reality independent of the scientific debate over a biological definition. To
immediately take the position that 'race doesn't exist' ignores the 'fundamental truisms'
which have factored into the narrative of history writing in an innumerable amount of
ways. Looking at the derivatives of the term race such as 'racism', 'racist', and
'racialization', adds another layer to the cake, and ultimately show how race has been
taken as a biological given and used as a mechanism geared towards securing systems
based on prejudice, ignorance, and hatred. If race is about status and inequality of rank
within a particular society, then this modern concept can be expanded to include proto-
racist forms of classification which function in the same way. The very notion that there is

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[46] Herbes-Sommers, Christine. Race -- The Power of an Illusion: The Difference Between Us. 2005.
[47] Herbes-Sommers, Christine. Race -- The Power of an Illusion: The Difference Between Us. 2005.

a sense of difference conditioned into individuals from the earliest stages of life is not new and it has been structured into various social systems predating the eighteenth century establishment of 'race' as it is understood by the general public today.

As a tool, race arms individuals with the power to assign meaning to the appearance of an individual. These beliefs have been instrumental in creating 'real life differences' because they are linked to natural features such as skin color and other physical differences. In other words, the semblance of what we consider race manifests itself as the meaning society attaches to differences in pigmentation. In this way the ideology of race has assumed the status of an unassailable truth. Perceptions of others that are rooted in racial classification are essentialist stereotypes that have become embedded in the institutional frameworks of society and it is these generalized markers of physical features which have been used to denote higher or lower status unto people from the moment they are born.

The concept of 'race' demands that individuals be sorted and grouped into concrete categories. These categories are given an identifying label, respectively, which will then become a symbol, or identifier, that will guide all future interactions. The words 'white' and 'black' have come to symbolize distinct racial groups and thus they became symbols for recognizing difference. It was then the social meaning which was attached to this method of human classification that these symbols materialized into action. "'Race' is a shorthand term for, as well as symbol of, a 'knowledge system,' a way of knowing, of perceiving, and of interpreting the world, and of rationalizing its contents (in this case, other human beings), in terms that are derived from previous cultural-historical

experience and reflective of contemporary social values, relationships, and conditions." [48].

The one-drop rule classified anyone with a single-drop of black blood as black but native-born blacks are also characterized by a broad range of skin colors and physical characteristics, thus, this unification is not based on purely physical traits but instead, "it had to be cultural and social... For this cultural nationalism to be meaningful it had to emphasize precisely the lifestyle which was peculiar to the black community; and the traditional cradle of this peculiar life style has always been the lower class"[49].

Herodotus visited Egypt in about 450 BCE and spent a few months traveling throughout the country, ultimately leading him to write his second book *History,* which is dedicated entirely to Egypt. Despite the significant number of texts that exist about Egypt, very few historians and geographers traveled to Ethiopia, which contributes to the confusion that ensued among the ancients regarding their exact geographical location. For elite Greco-Roman authors, "Ethiopia represented 'the end of the earth' (eschaton tes ges)"[50] and thus it was understood as a part of the world far removed from the center of Greek culture. In a sense, this ambiguity laid the groundwork for a mystification of the characteristic features presented about Ethiopians in Greek writing. To this, Herodotus writes:

> Where the south declines towards the setting sun lies the country called Ethiopia, the last inhabited land in that direction...... The Ethiopians are said to be the tallest and handsomest men in the whole world. In their customs they differ greatly from the rest of mankind, and particularly in the way they choose their kings; for they find out the man who is the tallest of all the citizens, and of strength equal to his

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[48] Smedley, Audrey. 2007. *Race in North America: Origin and Evolution of a Worldview.* 15.

[49] Lacy, Karen. Blue-Chip Black: Race, Class, and Status in the New Black Middle Class. 174.

[50] Byron, Gay L. *Symbolic Blackness and Ethnic Difference in Early Christian Literature.* 31.

height, and appoint him to rule over them . . . The spies were told that most of them lived to be a hundred and twenty years old, while some even went beyond that age --- they ate boiled flesh, and had for their drink nothing but milk.[51]

This description of the Ethiopians provided by Herodotus is not derogatory, however it does characterize them, as an entire group, as distinct from the Greeks both in their cultural practices, physical appearance, and diet. The dehumanized conception of Ethiopians is evident in the description of their appearance. In Virgil's *Moretum* he writes: "African in her race, her whole figure proof of her country - her hair tightly curled, lips thick, color dark, chest broad, breasts pendulous, belly somewhat pinched, legs thin, and feet broad and simple"[52]. The association being drawn here, between location and appearance, surfaces in many other sources as well.

Environmental determinism reveals itself in the writings of Herodotus, who attributes the maxim that 'soft regions breed soft men' to the Persian king Kyros the Great[53]. This concept is also elaborated on by Hippocrates. In Hippocrates' *On Airs, Waters, and Places,* he writes that the Asiatics (people from Asia) suffer from:

> cowardice, the principal reason for their unwarlike and gentler disposition is the nature of the seasons; for there is neither excitement of the understanding nor any strong change of the body whereby the temper might be ruffled and they be roused to inconsiderate emotion and passion.[54]

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[51] Herodotus. *The Histories*. Book III.; Herodotus, The History, trans. George Rawlinson.

[52] Virgil. *Moretum*. 31-35.

[53] Herodotus. *The Histories*. 9.122.

[54] Hippocrates. *On Airs, Waters, and Places*. 16.

Further, Hippocrates goes on to argue that "geography, local water-supplies, and prevailing winds determine not only the health of a population but also its collective character"[55]. The implication here is that as a migrating population, the Persians were susceptible to changes in their collective character. Kyros "utterance is designed to act as a warning against the Persians moving to a more hospitable land where they would lose their rugged temperament and cease to be rulers"[56]. These examples demonstrate a belief that the collective character of a group correlates to the climate in which it is situated.

In this way, the Persian War of 480-479 BC was a definitive historical moment for the Greeks. "Persia gave the Greeks their identity"[57] through their invasion by acting as a catalyst for the invention of the barbarian. In other words, this conflict led to a process whereby a derogatory and stereotypical 'other' was created in order to both mirror and elevate the Greek customs. Herodotus' pitting of Greek against Persian, of liberty against servitude, of free choice against tyrannical compulsion, as a "linchpin for Hellenic identity in contrast to eastern barbarism"[58]. He supplies the claim that all Greeks share a particular network of similarities and provides a checklist for characterizing "Greekness". In this way, he delineated the ethnicity of his fellow Greeks through a set of particular factors - common blood, language, shrines, sacrifices, and traditional ways of life - when he writes,

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[55] Herodotus. *On Airs, Waters, Places.* 24.
[56] Hall, Jonathan H.,. Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity. 7.
[57] Hornblower. A Commentary on Thucydides, Volume 3. 11.
[58] Gruen, Eric. *Rethinking the Other in Antiquity.* 22.

> For there are many great reasons why we should not do this, even if we so desired; first and foremost, the burning and destruction of the adornments and temples of our gods, whom we are constrained to avenge to the utmost rather than make pacts with the perpetrator of these things, and next the kinship of all Greeks in blood and speech, and the shrines of gods and the sacrifices that we have in common, and the likeness of our way of life, to all of which it would not befit the Athenians to be false.[59]

Though they clearly distinguished themselves from the Athenians, this was a key moment for the construction of a 'Hellenic' group identity because it demanded a paradigm shift in how the Greeks viewed themselves and others. The shared experience of conflict with Persia and consequently the stereotype of the non-Greek, or barbarian, became a pillar of Greekness.

> Ethnic identity can rarely achieve a salience in the absence of an 'outgroup' against which an ethnic group can define itself through a process of intergroup comparison and by establishing a stereotypical, generalized image of the exotic, slavish, and unintelligible barbarian, Greek identity could be defined 'from without', through opposition with this image of alterity. To find the language, culture or rituals of the barbarian desperately alien was to immediately define oneself as Greek[60].

A sharp symbolic dividing line was thus constructed between the Greek and the Barbarian, therefore leaving no doubt as to the Greekness of those on the 'inside'. This identity was oppositional and thus it was based on a similarity in peer groups which found their attachment through an invocation of common descent that strictly opposed a contrasting 'ethnic' group. The customary understanding of the term ethnicity has a more narrow association than just an overarching shared culture. Herodotus however, does include blood on the list and this signifies that "Greekness" was not simply a learned

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[59] Herodotus. The Histoires. 8.1444. 2-3.
[60] Hall, Jonathan H. Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity. 47.

socialization. Rather, blood conveys a "collective descent, lineage, ancestry, or kinship - in short, race"[61]. This excerpt from Herodotus' text must be situated within the historical context that it was being written.

Around 1200 B.C. the power and prosperity of Mycenaean Greece was lost in a period of violent conflict. While the underlying causes of this are still up for debate, the damage done to Greek society is a historical fact. Athens, fortunately for them, was not significantly affected. In fact, they appear to have escaped the disaster entirely. There was a sense of pride that developed out of this and later Athenians accorded themselves a "unique status among the peoples of classical Greece" because they had not been forced "to emigrate in the turmoil that engulfed the rest of Greece in the twelfth and eleventh centuries B.C"[62].. Athenian orators, historians, and dramatists illuminate the extent to which the people of Athens understood themselves as pure-blooded, and unique from the rest of their Greek counterparts. They employed the concept of "*autochthonoi*" when referencing an Athenian, which implied that they had sprung from the soil of their homeland, Athens[63]. "Αὐτός", which means the self," and χθών, the "soil" combined to construct this concept, which was then used to indicate that the speaker was an original inhabitant of their country. This, opposed to settlers, because even they were not free from an admixture of foreign people, and thus, foreign blood. The claim to indigenous purity was unique within the Greek identity.

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[61] Gruen, Eric. *Did Ancient Ethnicity Depend on Ethnicity? A Preliminary Probe*. 2.
[62] Konstam, Angus. *Historical Atlas of Ancient Greece*. Perseus. Web.
[63] Konstam, Angus. *Historical Atlas of Ancient Greece*. Perseus. Web.

Thucydides was an Athenian, and he narrated a story of genocide in the Melian Dialogue[64], which took place in the sixteenth year of the war. In this text, he highlights the "rational" character of the ancient origins of genocide in which the Athenians employed their robust navy to establish dominion over a Spartan colony on Melos, an Aegean Island. The Athenians, in their discussion with the Melian leaders, emphasized their lack of interest in justifying their demand for submission and based the argument on their historical rights as the Athenian Empire. They considered the establishment of hegemony in the Islands as a decision that served the best interest of the Empire and rejected negotiation indefinitely. In other words, if Melos did not submit, the Athenians would extinguish its inhabitants. The question of identity was undoubtedly a crucial element in this decision on the part of the Athenian leaders because the subjugation of the island would convey to both the Spartans as well as their own people that, as a force, they were impregnable. When the Melians refused to submit, as Thucydides writes: the Athenians "put to death all the grown men whom they took, and sold the women and children for slaves, and subsequently sent out five hundred colonists and inhabited the place themselves..."[65] This brutal and cruel treatment of peoples who were considered enemies, or at least allies of the enemy, was a common trend for both the Spartans and the Athenians. For both there is a palpable sense of "the alien nature of the enemies that they conquered and slayed."[66] This essence of expansion and conquest is not unique to the Spartans and the Athenians but it captures the spirit of the Romans as well.

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[64] Konstam, Angus. *Historical Atlas of Ancient Greece.* Perseus. Web.

[65] Naimark, Norman M. Genocide: A World History. 12.

[66] Naimark, Norman M. Genocide: A World History. 13.

Thucydides' account of the Athenians thought process, which was purely rational in its nature, illuminates how the hubris of their empire was insulted from the idea of any opposition - in whatever form it came - and was ready to go up-in-arms in the name of securing their version of hegemony. Ethnic difference was emphasized as a way to elevate the Roman identity through the process of marginalizing foreigners and strangers as 'alien'. In the process of these early genocides, nothing that was representative of the lost-culture was left. Temples were burnt to the ground, statues were destroyed, and all signs of glory were turned to dust. The men were murdered but the women and children, when spared, were assimilated into the cultures of the dominating force.

The Greeks thought their Mediterranean climate was the best in the world. Aristotle illustrates how the Greeks understood the relationship between the external environment and the internal individual. In light of Aristotle's claim that climate controls political destiny, the Greeks understood themselves as superior.

> The nations inhabiting the cold places and those of Europe are full of spirit but somewhat deficient in intelligence and skill, so that they continue comparatively free, but lacking in political organization and capacity to rule their neighbors. The peoples of Asia on the other hand are intelligent and skillful in temperament, but lack spirit, so that they are in continuous subjection and slavery. But the Greek race participates in both characters, just as it occupies the middle position geographically, for it is both spirited and intelligent; hence it continues to be free and to have very good political institutions, and to be capable of ruling all mankind if it attains constitutional unity. The same diversity also exists among the Greek races compared with one another: some have a one-sided nature, others are happily blended in regard to both these capacities.[67]

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[67] Aristotle. Politics. 7.1327b.

This dual-nature of "Greekness" is another explanation for why the Athenians distinguished themselves from other Greeks. Note that in the last line, "the same diversity also exists among the Greek races compared with one another," the translator chose to use the word 'race'. In the original text, Aristotle uses the word **γένος,** which is defined as race, stock, or kin[68]. In this way, it denotes the idea that there is a shared lineage or line of descent. Therefore, while Aristotle is stating the claim that there is diversity of character amongst the Greeks based on their placement geographically, ultimately he still uses **γένος** as a blanket term to include all those who fit into the ethnic category of Greekness.

Contrary to the Greek conception of cultural homogeneity, the Romans understood themselves a "mongrel nation from the start"[69]. One of the most celebrated symbolic representations of this mindset is demonstrated by one story - the rape of the Sabine women. It reveals how the Romans embraced the "comingling of peoples"[70] and understood it, specifically this account - fictitious or not - as the emblematic representation of their identity. Rome, in this way, was made up of a blend of Trojans, Sabine's, and Aborigines. Cato the elder, a Roman writer, "assigned the origin of the Sabine's to a Spartan founder whose name conveniently happened to be Sabus, and he explicitly asserted that the *populas romanus* derived those commendable qualities,"[71]

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[68] Aristotle. Aristotle in 23 Volumes, Vol. 21, translated by H. Rackham.
[69] Gruen, Eric. *Did Ancient Identity Depend on Ethnicity? A Preliminary Probe.* 4.
[70] Gruen, Eric. *Did Ancient Identity Depend on Ethnicity? A Preliminary Probe.* 5.
[71] Gruen, Eric. *Did Ancient Identity Depend on Ethnicity? A Preliminary Probe.* 4.

those that made Romans rugged warriors with rigid moral virtue, "from the Sabine's" [72].

Further, Aeneas, who the Romans saw as the "quintessential Trojan," was from Arcadia in

Greece. Some stories suggest that Aeneas moved from Troy to Arcadia, before eventually

settling in Italy where he bore a son, Romulus[73]. This solidified the Troy-Arcadia-Rome

lineage. In this way, Roman self-conceptualization encompassed a "plurality of

bloodlines"[74].

The Greeks chose to disregard this, passed it off as fiction, whereas the Romans

embraced it completely. So much so in fact, that it became an integral element of the

Roman tradition. In essence, the "Greek authors converted the sagas of Troy to bring

Romans within the matrix of Hellenic traditions," [75] and from there the Romans adjusted

those stories to align with their own narrative. It was in this spirit that the Romans

embraced a Trojan lineage that "gave them character distinct from that of the Greeks but

solidly within the Greek construct" [76]. Fabius Pictor, the first Roman historian, wrote in

Greek and he postulated Greek ancestry for Rome. Further, that the cultural

underpinnings stemmed back to the Phoenicians, from whom the Greeks were able to

create their version of an alphabet[77]. In this way the Romans firmly embraced their

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[72] Cato. F2.22.

[73] Gruen, Eric. *Rethinking the Other in Antiquity.* 247.

[74] Gruen, Eric. *Did Ancient Identity Depend on Ethnicity? A Preliminary Probe.* 6.

[75] Gruen, Eric. *Rethinking the Other in Antiquity.* 247.

[76] Gruen, Eric. *Rethinking the Other in Antiquity.* 247.

[77] Gruen, Eric. *Rethinking the Other in Antiquity.* 244.

broader Hellenistic associations and paid homage to them for qualities that they gained as a result.

When the Romans invaded Carthage, their intentions were not only to eliminate its inhabitants but also to eradicate their city on the basis of an intolerance towards their culture. One Carthaginian practice that they were particularly appalled by, was the ritual that involved sacrificing children to the deities Tanit, and Baal Hammon[78]. The Romans saw this practice as something that differentiated the Carthaginians from themselves both culturally and morally. The success of the Roman Senate consequently reveals how their intentions were to completely eradicate the memory of Carthage from the narrative of history. This was demonstrated by the change in referral of these territories in North Africa once known as Carthage, to a provincia called "Africa"[79]. The character of this genocide is brutal and there are similarities in intention that are resonant of modern ethnic, religious, and racial prejudices. "Armies of men killing identifiable groups of human beings, including women, children, and noncombatants, at the command of their political leaders, who often invoke ideologies, gods, and God in their arguments for destruction"[80] shares a commonality with racial categorization that places mass groups of people who have varying cultural identities into a secondary-human status. Feelings of

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[78] Spence, Iain , Douglas Kelly, Peter Londey, and Sara Elise Phang. *Conflict in Ancient Greece and Rome: the Definitive Political, Social, and Military Encylopedia*. 764.

[79] Naimark, *Norman M. Genocide: A World History*. 14.

[80] Naimark, *Norman M. Genocide: A World History*. 14.

superiority in the case of the Athenians and the Romans came in part from a desire for

new territory and the plight to secure a dominant geopolitical identity[81].

By the start of the first century AD, color had been institutionalized as a technical

term in rhetoric and it developed out of a practice which taught young scholars to 'shade'

the facts with their own interpretation of the material. This technique, of "applying a

complexion to the facts" had become known as a way of coloring one's position"[82]. In this

way the students were taught by their tutors to use certain words that would attribute

favorable or unfavorable characteristics to the subject of their work. To conceptualize

one's color was to conceptualize deeper meanings about one's ethics or emotion. While

there were academic and skeptical concerns about this practice, nonetheless, for the

educated Roman, color was a powerful index of these characteristics.

Greek and Roman literature has a tendency to apply a general term to any member

of a 'dark-skinned tribe' - the name Αiθίoψ - and it derives from "αἴθoς" and "ὄψ," which

together describe someone with a charred or burnt face[83]. In other words, it was the most

common generic word given by Greeks and Romans onto "dark and black skinned

peoples who lived south of Egypt and on the southern fringes of northwest Africa"[84]. The

word Αiθίoψ became a term that was used to identify some individuals who were not

citizens of the Roman Empire, or more abstractly, those who sat on the outskirts of

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[81] Spence, Iain , Douglas Kelly, Peter Londey, and Sara Elise Phang. *Conflict in Ancient Greece and Rome: the Definitive Political, Social, and Military Encylopedia*. 765.
[82] Bradley, Mark. *Colour and Meaning in Ancient Rome.* 121.
[83] Bradley, Mark. *Colour and Meaning in Ancient Rome.* 138.
[84] Bowser, Benjamin P., *Racism and Anti-Racism in World Perspective.* 4.

civilized life. Because of this, it created a somatic and cultural distance between the speaker and the subject being spoken about. Facial color for the Greeks and Roman was thus an evocative expression of identity as a whole[85]. The prevailing notion underlying this term was that such color, to be excessively tanned, was not natural and the result of "either barbarian origin or of unnatural exposure to the sun"[86]. Further that this method of identification was used to symbolize not only physical traits, but cultural practices unique to the group as well. An example of this is noted by Petronius, the author of Satyricon, and he writes: "one cannot 'pass for' an Ethiopian merely by blackening one's face: a complete Ethiopian disguise requires thick lips, tightly curled hair, and cicatrices (scarification) on the forehead."[87]

When Augustus came to power and took control of the Roman Empire in 30 BCE, a shift occurred whereby Egypt became an exploited and conquered territory 'under the personal domain of the emperor'. Adding Egypt to the empire through the use of calculated military force led to confusion for many Greco-Roman authors on how to articulate their social and legal status. The citizens of the three Greek cities, Alexandria, Ptolemais, and Naukratis, had privileges which distinguished them from the remainder of the inhabitants of Egypt. Alexandria became the political and economic capital of Roman Egypt and as a result, Roman citizenship was not given to an Egyptian unless citizenship was first and foremost held there. Legal status was thus based on three categories: the

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[85] Bradley, Mark. *Colour and Meaning in Ancient Rome.* 140.

[86] Bradley, Mark. *Colour and Meaning in Ancient Rome.* 140.

[87] Petronius. *Satyricon.* 102.; Bowser, Benjamin P. *Racism and Anti-Racism in World Perspective.* 35.

first being those who held Roman citizenship, the second, the citizens of the three Greek

cities, and the third, the non-citizens, or 'Egyptians'[88].

Greco-Roman authors were clearly consumed with describing the distinguishable

differences in physical attributes of Egyptians, Ethiopians, and Blacks. While these

physical recounts were not necessarily intended to convey an unfavorable notion of these

ethnic groups, these physical descriptions do contribute to a broader communication of

values and ideas about the "aesthetic sensibilities that were operative within the ancient

Mediterranean culture"[89]. Color was understood as a point of reference in the imperial

metropolis and was used as a tool in ethnographic work to convey not only where the

group or individual came from but also behavioral patterns, behavior, and disposition.

Despite the fact that the Greco-Roman authors were not consistent in their descriptions

of Ethiopians and Egyptians, there is an observable pattern where the texts muddle the

two groups into one - under an umbrella of association with dark or black skin.

In a prophecy that Prometheus gives to Io, he tells her that she will visit a remote

country of "a black race which dwells by the waters of the sun, where the river Aethiop

is"[90]. Further, Strabo describes how the ancient Greeks conceived of unknown countries

and their inhabitants, writing:

> I assert that the ancient Greeks, in the same way as they classed all the northern
> nations with which they were familiar under the one name of Scythians, or,
> according to Homer, Nomades, and afterwards becoming acquainted with those

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[88] Byron, Gay L., *Symbolic Blackness and Ethnic Difference in Early Christian Literature*. 35.

[89] Byron, Gay L., *Symbolic Blackness and Ethnic Difference in Early Christian Literature*. 39.

[90] Snowden, Frank M. Jr. *Some Greek and Roman Observations on the Ethiopian*. 22.; Aeschylus. *Prometheus Bound*. 709, 807.

towards the west, styled them Kelts and Iberians; sometimes compounding the names into Keltiberians, or Keltoscythians, thus ignorantly uniting various distinct nations; so I affirm they designated as Ethiopia the whole of the southern countries towards the ocean[91].

Both of these accounts provide an illustration of the ambiguity that surrounded foreign places and people. For the Greeks, anyone who was unknown, or an 'other', was grouped into an all-encompassing identity that, in essence, framed them as a different race. In a discussion about geographical proximity of the Scythians, Greeks, and Ethiopians, Diodorus concludes that "in light of the great difference in climate in such a slight space, it is to be expected that not only the regimen and manner of life, but also the bodies of the inhabitants should be very different from what one finds amongst the Greeks"[92]. Climate was therefore the mechanism by which notions about Ethiopian habits were understood; such as in the case of Ptolemy, who saw their 'savagery' as a consequence of their homes' oppression by the heat[93]. This attempt to explain physical differences using an environment theory was not unique to Ethiopians but rather it was a tradition of both Greek and Romans to account for the characteristics of all foreign people unlike themselves in this way.

Women in the Greco-Roman world used early forms of makeup to whiten their skin because the Greeks and Romans saw lightness of skin as the aesthetic ideal. In this way, there was a conscious connection drawn between skin pigmentation and social

[91] Strabo. *Geography.* 1.2.27.
[92] Snowden, Frank M. Jr. *Some Greek and Roman Observations on the Ethiopian.* 25.
[93] Snowden, Frank M. Jr. *Some Greek and Roman Observations on the Ethiopian.* 25.; Ptolemy. *Tetrabiblos.* 2.z.56.

status. The whiteness was used to coat arms, faces, and shoulders in order to make the skin appear lighter in color and it was known as 'cosmetic art', or *ars ornatrix* in Hellenistic and Roman literary work[94]. This would signal that the individual in question was of high status as a consequence of their occupation. In other words, appearing pale was a presentation of self that implied that those who had white skin didn't work outdoors[95]. An anonymous third-century epitaph of a black slave from Antinoe in Roman Egypt says: "among the living I was very black, darkened by the rays of the sun. But beauty is less important than nobility of soul; and my soul, ever blooming with the whiteness of flowers, attracted the goodwill of my prudent master and embellished the blackness of my physical appearance."[96] This attribution of whiteness and blackness with morality, or lack thereof, became a common rhetorical strategy. Further, the assertion that the presumed standard of beauty for women was that they were white or non-Ethiopian, is validated in part by an example in which an Ethiopian woman is used as a way to illustrate the antithesis of attractiveness: "she recognized her husband, but he could not recognize her; so much her beauty had disappeared to the point where she looked like an Ethiopian woman."[97]. The descriptions provided here demonstrate how color-symbolic language was a mechanism for ascribing more meaningful characteristics. By drawing connections between 'whiteness', 'nobility of the soul', and 'beauty', the

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[94] Bradley, Mark. *Colour and Meaning in Ancient Rome.* 161.

[95] Varichon, Anne, and Toula Ballas. *Colors: What They Mean and How to Make Them.* 41.

[96] Byron, Gay L., *Symbolic Blackness and Ethnic Difference in Early Christian Literature.* 37.

[97] Anonymous. *Apophthegmata Patrum* 1596, 10 in *Les Sentences des Peres du Desert: Nouveau Recueil.* 241.

inference is that the color 'white' was demonstrative of a positive characteristic. Thus, even those who were 'black' or 'Ethiopian' looking in appearance were, according to these sources, not only considered less-than-beautiful but also were assumed to have a lesser soul.

It is important to note that there were a number of physical features which were seen as lesser in comparison to how the Greeks and Romans saw themselves. "The Romans conceived of the over-large penis," for example, "as a non-beautiful physical peculiarity, like the black skin of the aethiops, the red hair of the German, or the deformities of the dwarf and the hunchback"[98]. Thus, while there were multiple forms in which negative stigmas were attached to visual appearance, nonetheless, color was consistently used as an essential informative unit for "the classification and evaluation of the Roman world"[99].

One of the first explicitly negative description of blacks can be traced back to the writings of Cicero, who calls Ethiopians stupid[100]. Juvenal's contempt for Ethiopians reveals itself through an emphasis on their color: "Let the straight legged man laugh at the club-footed, the white man at the Ethiopian (derideat Aethiopem albus)"[101]. Classicist J. P. Balsdon's commentary on the social order and moral value attached to skin color in Greco-Roman culture offers the idea that "while little direct evidence of color prejudice may exist, at the same time we find no evidence of mixed marriages between whites and

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[98] Clarke, John R. *Sexuality and Visual Representation.* 526.
[99] Bradley, Mark. *Colour and Meaning in Ancient Rome.* 122.
[100] Cicero. *De Senectute.* 6.; Beardsley, Grace Hadley. *The Negro and Roman Civilization.* 119.
[101] Satire 2.23., *Juvenal and Persius,* trans. G.G. Ramsey. 18-19.

blacks in Greek or Roman upper classes"[102]. The key here, upper classes, conveys the

notion that while there were instances of intermarriage, nonetheless the elite sphere

operated in a way that allowed those in it to maintain and secure their position. As ruling

and governing members of society, they allowed foreigners to assimilate culturally,

however the elevated status of elites was, we can infer, reserved strictly for those who

were born there. Despite the appreciation Greeks had towards Egyptians in respect to

religion and learning, nonetheless they considered themselves culturally superior, as we

have seen, and this impacted consideration for citizenship. For individuals who were the

sons of a mixed marriage, citizenship was not available for them, and in some cases

legitimacy was denied to marriages between Greeks and the indigenous population[103].

Literature produced in fourth and fifth century illustrates a belief in an indivisible

connection between Ethiopians and demons[104]. Ancient Christian authors used the

ethnic groups of Egyptians, Ethiopians, and Blacks as polemical devices or ethnic tropes,

which would, at times, result in both vituperative and idealized depictions of these

people. The purpose of these tropes were to clarify the self-definitions of early

Christianity as well as its place and purpose within the Greco-Roman world[105]. In effect,

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[102] Hood, Robert Earl. *Begrimed and Black: Christian Traditions on Blacks and Blackness*. 41.

[103] Davis, Simon. *Race Relations in Ancient Egypt*. 54.

[104] Byron, Gay L., *Piety, Politics, and Ideology: The Use of Ethiopians in Late Antique of Monastic Literature*. 20.; Brakke, David. *Ethiopian Demons: Male Sexuality, the Black-Skinned Other, and the Monastic Self*. 503.

[105] Byron, Gay L., *Piety, Politics, and Ideology: The Use of Ethiopians in Late Antique of Monastic Literature*. 20.; Brakke, David. *Ethiopian Demons: Male Sexuality, the Black-Skinned Other, and the Monastic Self*. 503.

these are ideological constructions that function symbolically and communicate certain values held by the authors and their respective audience. In other words, the rhetoric portrayed a "'vituperation' that policed ethnic as well as ascetic boundaries;"[106] further, that the texts "represent a type of political invective which effectively marginalizes Ethiopians'"[107]. In other words, the dual theology presented here illuminates the ancient Christian sensitivities to color-symbolism, due in part to the association they made between blackness and demons.

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[106] Byron, Gay L., *Piety, Politics, and Ideology: The Use of Ethiopians in Late Antique of Monastic Literature*. 103.; Brakke, David. *Ethiopian Demons: Male Sexuality, the Black-Skinned Other, and the Monastic Self*. 504.

[107] Brakke, David. *Ethiopian Demons: Male Sexuality, the Black-Skinned Other, and the Monastic Self*. 504.

MOSES

The Lausiac History was written in 419 by Palladius of Galatia and it archives the

lives and stories of the Desert Fathers who lived in Egypt around the early fourth century

AD. The 'Desert Fathers' consisted of early Christian ascetics and monks who had

exhibited exceptional religious fervor and religiosity in Egypt. One of the most unique

biographies recorded is about a man who, before being named 'Saint Moses the black,'

was known by the title of 'Moses the Robber.' Palladius' account of Abba Moses in the

Lausiac History chronicles the transformation of an Ethiopian sinner to a seemingly 'race-

less' ascetic - a bandit leader to a Christian saint - by changing the way he is identified in

the text. This process simultaneously reveals an underlying cultural logic that existed in

Greco-Roman culture. A critical analysis of the color-language employed in this text

illuminates how humans were classified through the use of a strategy that was deeply

rooted in ethnic prejudice. Further, how that ethnic prejudice led to the formation of

'tropes' and stereotypes that over time paved the way for transitive xenophobia and 21st

century racism.

According to the text, Moses lived from around 330 to 405 CE. For the first half of

his life Moses was the slave of a high ranking Egyptian official, but as Palladius reveals he

was later expelled from the house due to his 'immorality and brigandage'. In order to

demonstrate Moses' holy repentance, Palladius provides two contrasting descriptions of

Moses; the first characterization demonizes his earlier state of being, while the latter

portrays him in a way that impresses the reader with a notion that he is a saint. One of the ways in which Palladius discusses Moses' character early on, is through the attribution of his ethnic origin and skin color as correlated to his character. By indicating that he is "black" and "Ethiopian by birth" in the opening line of the text, Palladius is playing into the stereotypes associated with Ethiopians in Greco-Roman culture and thus, aids in Moses' depiction as the antithesis of virtue and goodness[108]. Language is thus the key to understanding the complex social attitudes held at this time. In this case it reveals Romans general ethnocentric reactions to foreignness in bodies and culture. By associating Moses' sinfulness and faulty character with his blackness and Ethiopian ethnicity, it alludes to the notion that the natural condition of Ethiopians and black-skinned individuals is inherently evil.

Palladius portrays young Moses as 'wicked,' and the 'leader of a robber-band' - even insinuating that he was a murderer. While the text does not reveal concrete evidence to this last point, nonetheless Palladius successfully conveys the message that Moses is the *type* of person who would do such an act. The consequences of the harsh language used to portray his character however, ultimately dehumanize him. In Palladius' description, Moses comes across as almost non-human. It translates to:

> Desirous to kill him, he [Moses] looked about to find the place where the shepherd kept his sheep. And he was informed that it was on the opposite bank of the Nile. And, since the river was in flood and about a mile in extent, he grasped his sword in his mouth and put his shirt on his head and so got over, swimming the river. While he was swimming over, the shepherd was able to escape him by burying himself in the sand. So, having killed the four best rams and tied them together

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[108] Brakke, David. *Ethiopian Demons: Male Sexuality, the Black-Skinned Other, and the Monastic Self.* 501-535.

with a cord, he swam back again. And having come to a little homestead he flayed the sheep, and having eaten the best of the flesh and sold the skins in exchange for wine, he drank a quart that is eighteen Italian pints, and went off fifty miles further to where he had his band. [109]

This description frames Moses as something of a super-sinner. Filled with rage, the text supposes that he swam two miles back and forth across the Nile River while holding his sword in his mouth, but on the return trip he also carried with him four rams-worth of meat, which he then ate before drinking his weight in wine and running fifty more miles. This grossly exaggerated narrative effectively frames Moses as a bad slave, robber, and immoral person, in order to emphasize the opposing characterization that will follow.

While this analysis will not explicitly detail the various accounts of Moses's story, it is important to note that other references, such as the one in Apophthegmata Patrum ("Sayings of the Fathers") emphasize Moses' blackness as well. In this way, it is arguable that this story is not simply about a sinner who becomes pious and happens to be black, it is about a black man whose 'ethnic' categorization is of the highest significance. In this way, the polarization of blackness opposed to whiteness serves as a mechanism that show how imperfect existence in the form of an 'other' served as an opposing symbol to the ideal religious, ascetic life. Palladius did not need to explicitly state prejudice against Moses *because* of his blackness, however the implied message being conveyed here is that the mere mention of Moses as Ethiopian and black would be enough to convey to the reader that something about his natural condition made him different and thus, less than.

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[109] Palladius. *Lausiac History*. 19.

Ethiopian Moses is characterized as an ideal monk in Palladius' *Lausiac History.* It is once he learns to face and reject the demons who controlled him that he finds god. He learns to "endure" his plight through asceticism, and is told only then will the "demons gets discouraged and have to leave [him]"[110]. In this way the text about Moses "suggests that the ancient Christians followed a widespread trend among Greeks and Romans with respect to color symbolism;"[111] and it reveals how the *Lausiac History* played a role in propagandizing asceticism as an advancement away from associating with black or foreign people and their assumed sinful human condition.

Given the emphasis that the Greco-Roman societies placed on the cultivation of the self and the mind through intellectual spirit and body, the consequences of labeling someone as an 'other' or non-member of their community, implied their subordination, or secondary position. If an individual was thought of as a non-Greek, or an 'other,' the implication was that he or she was socially and culturally "lower". Therefore by classifying and identifying individuals, specifically Moses in this case, as an Αἰθίοψ, it was a form of 'proto-racism'[112]. Analyzing Palladius' depiction of Moses in the Lauditus History reveals the relationship between discourse and color-coding. Through an exegesis of this material, one can identify how the attribution of color in the description of an individual, or an individual's clothing, reveals that this was a marker of one's class status, economic position, and sociality. This particular example illuminates how looking at the color symbolism impregnated in the rhetoric of Christian asceticism is a fundamental element

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[110] Palladius. *Lausiac History*. 19. From: The Lausiac History of Palladius, II.

[111] Byron, Gay L., *Symbolic Blackness and Ethnic Difference in Early Christian Literature*. 118.

[112] Isaac, Bradley. *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity*. 10.

in order to understand the cultural priorities of the ancient world. Further, it reveals a shift from geographically based markers of ethnic character to an essentialist, and therefore permanent, marker of Moses' character.

The *Apophthegmata Patrum*, often abbreviated *AP*, was written in the fifth century and it is a compilation of stories about the first few generations of the "desert fathers", otherwise known as the Christians who retreated into the Egyptian desert in order to pursue an ascetic life. Various references to Ethiopian Moses gives explicit mention of skin color, revealing another demonstration of a connection between color symbolism and ascetic piety. When Moses first comes among the monks they ask him, "Why does this Αἰθίοψ (Ethiopian) come and go among us?"[113] This is a clear indicator of, not necessarily early ethnic prejudice but clear recognition of boundary lines that were being crossed (metaphorically and literally). It is demonstrative of a belief in Ethiopians, or foreigners, as lacking ascetic piety. Further, it affirms that the monks whom Moses are approaching, is made up of non-Blacks. Whether this was believed to be something of an unchangeable nature, it is clear that the assumed position of an Ethiopian was that they did not have a place in a virtuous community. The connection being drawn here between ascetic piety and rhetoric's of color difference illuminates an element of the ethno-political dynamic whereby the "advancement of the attractiveness and superiority of the ascetic life is done at the expense of Moses, not just as an individual but [also] as representative of black peoples"[114]. In other words, the symbolizing nature of Moses'

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[113] AP = Jean-Claude Guy (ed.), Les apophtegmes des pères. Collection systématique. Chapitres X-XVI. Paris: Édition Cerf, 2003. (Sources chrétiennes 474).
[114] Wimbush, Vincent L., *Ascetic Behavior and Colorful Language: Stories about Ethiopian Moses*. 89.

narrative presents his attainment of virtue as a consequence of cleansing himself of Ethiopian ethnic and color difference. Moreover, it reveals how individuals who were considered 'others' were either conquered or "incorporated into provinces and, in due course of time, became part of an integrated empire, this entailed a process of ethnic disintegration or decomposition"[115]. Here, Moses needed to rid himself of his Ethiopian identity in order to establish himself as an integrated member of the group.

Another explicit reference to color symbolism occurs during a scene in which Moses is ordained as a cleric:

> It was said of Father Moses that he became a cleric, and they laid the tunic upon him. And the archbishop said to him, "Behold you have become completely white (ὁλόλευκος), Father Moses." The old man said to him, "Indeed, the outside, O Lord Father; would that the inside were also white!" The archbishop, wishing to put him to test, said to the clerics, "When Father Moses comes into the sanctuary, drive him out, and go along with him to hear what he says." So the old man came in and they rebuked him and drove him out, saying, "Go away, Ethiopian (ὕπαγε ἔξο αἰθιόψ)." He left and said to himself, "Rightly have they treated you, ash skin, Black one (σποδόδερμε μέλανε). As you are not human, why should you come among humans?[116]

This example illuminates how the white-black dualism was used as a way to discuss and describe the apparent spiritual transformation occurring in this scene. Where he, Moses, was once referred to as black (μέλας), he's now labeled not only as white, but 'completely white'. The symbolism of the tunic (this assumption based presumably on the word λεῦκος, 'white') conveys to the reader that by placing this 'white marker' on him following the ordination into monkhood, that as a garb it is indicative of his being set apart from

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[115] Isaac, Benjamin. *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity*. 8.
[116] PG 65.285. English Translation in Wicker. *Ethiopian Moses*. 341.

his previous identity and signals his preparation to assume the ascetic life[117]. The idea here is that the white tunic, λεῦκος, is a recognizable symbol for renunciation and purity. Furthermore, another key element is the author's conveyance that Moses too does not see the change in clothing-color as making him white enough - "O Lord Father; would that the inside were also white!" The implication here is that the tunic is an attempt to purify Moses through a transformation in appearance, from black to white, but that nonetheless, he still is impaired in some way. In other words, that his external appearance represents, perhaps even determines, an internal condition - if he is black on the outside, he must be evil on the inside.

The color-symbolic language is significant in itself but the explicit reference to Moses' ethnic identity cannot be ignored. When Moses enters the room of monks, he is put to the test. The monks intend to observe his reaction - "When Father Moses comes into the sanctuary, drive him out and go along with him to hear what he says." While this may have been typical for all potential incoming monks, the crucial point here is in the addressing of Moses by using an ethnic trope[118], αιθιοψ. Gay Byron asserts that Moses' reaction is the most compelling piece of this text because it depicts "Moses in a self-denigrating manner". Rather than get angry, or just simply leaving, Moses validates the position of his antagonists. Taking leave from the monks, Moses uses color-symbolic language to reprimand himself and consequently, label himself as a non-human. This scene reveals something about the societal structures in the Roman world. By appealing

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[117] Byron, Gay l., *Symbolic Blackness and Ethnic Difference in Early Christian Literature*. 118.
[118] Byron, Gay L., *Symbolic Blackness and Ethnic Difference in Early Christian Literature*. 118.

to ethnic and color attitudes in a discussion of ascetic virtue, the author is presenting

Moses' natural being as fundamentally problematic, or at least a hurdle, in his plight for

the achievement of ascetic virtue. Color symbolism, in this way, became a way to

communicate values about good and evil or right and wrong.

The aforementioned source shows how a significant element of proto-racist thinking

comes from the notion that the outer physical characteristics of an individual were

actually surface manifestations of inherent behavioral, temperamental, intellectual, and

moral qualities. A belief in this biophysical form became even more problematic because

it implied that these qualities were inheritable and thus, the social rank attributed to an

individual's family, or parents, were attributed to their children as well. Stemming from

the word *gignesthai*, 'to be born', 'to come into being', and ultimately 'to become', the

term *genos* developed as a mechanism used to ascribe one's identity (birth), as well as the

collective group identity in which membership is thought to be ascribed through birth[119].

Genos is not exclusively reserved for one family unit and its definition extended to

include a category of any size that recognized its members as enlisted automatically by

birth[120]. "Similarly, the Hellenes can be described as both a *genos* and an *ethnos,* since one

of the defining criteria for Greekness, along with language, customs, and cult, was - for

Herodotus at any rate - shared blood"[121].

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[119] Hall, Jonathan h., *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity.* 35.
[120] Smith. 21.
[121] Hall, Jonathan J., *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity.* 35.

Ethnocentric beliefs held by the Greeks depicted all foreign, or alien, people as 'barbarians' who were both uncivilized and deficient in ability to govern themselves. The designation "barbarian" frequently has an "ethical meaning, referring to a person's deviation from Hellenic ethical and cultural mores"[122]. The Greeks believed that they needed to provide law and order throughout the Mediterranean world based on a sense of superiority in their governing institutions. The Romans too accepted individuals who assimilated into their culture, expecting them to take on Latin as a first language, and embrace Roman customs and laws as their own. Aristotle and Plato both, in various written works, speak of individuals who were "natural slaves" based on an inability to use reason. Aristotle elaborates on this position, contending that "all men differ as widely as the soul does from the body and the human being from the lower animal;"[123] the inference being that there are different degrees of people and some are of lesser character. In Politics I he writes that, "At his best man is the noblest of all animals; separated from law and justice he is the worst"[124]. He builds upon this idea and more explicitly writes that, "Ethiopians and people who live in hot regions have woolly hair, because both their brains and the environing air are dry"[125]. In this way, there is a connection being drawn between geographical locations and internal, and thus more telling, characteristics about those who inhabit those places. The Hellenistic world gradually moved away from

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[122] Lape, Susan. *Reproducing Athens: Menander's Comedy, Democratic Culture, and the Hellenistic City*. 195.

[123] Aristotle. *Politics I, Volume 21*. 1254b.

[124] Aristotle. *Politics I. Volume 21*. 1255b.

[125] Aristotle. *Politics I, Volume 21*. 1255b.

Aristotle's position on slavery as something justified on the basis of innate differences in capacity, and eventually settled on a distinction that was less 'racial' and more discriminatory towards groups with different cultural practices.

The uncomplimentary views of those who were black in pigmentation may also be reflected in the place that they were given upon entering society. In Rome, "Ethiopians were employed in brothels, in the theatre as actors and dancers, as boxers, acrobats, bath attendants, hunters, cooks, and other domestic servants"[126]. The aforementioned occupations were recognized as appropriate for those who possessed lesser status. Further, Plato called the Penestai (the serf population of Thessaly) an *ethnos* because they made up a group who held a particular function within the relations of production. The implication here is that serfs, who are regarded as having lower status than those who belong to the elite or ruling class, are referenced using the term *ethnos.* I previously mentioned how the term *ethnos* was multipurpose in its nature in that it was used interchangeably with *ethnos, genos, phylon, laos, genus,* and *natio* by the Greeks and Romans. A reference to the Penestai as an *ethnos* then, implies that they were understood as different from other Greeks. In other words, they were still recognized as Greeks but nonetheless, lower in comparison to their fellow Greeks. Separate but 'equal'.

Let us return to the idea of Greekness as constituted by having Greek blood. When two distinct ethnicities come into contact, there are varying ways to gauge how this interaction plays out. Hybridization happens in the event that the two distinct groups

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[126] Balsdon, John Percy Vyvyan Dacre. *Romans and Aliens.* 219.

amalgamate and thus, they become enveloped under one identity. This presupposes that there are identifiably separate strains of blood and some are more pure than others[127]… In this way, ancestry becomes a "central component" of identity construction and social interaction because the characteristics inherited from an individual's parents were in essence seen as "fundamental to their identity" and therefore dictated his or her capability and value[128]. In sum, given that the Greeks understood non-Greeks as having non-pure blood, they understood co-mingling with them as having the potential to produce offspring with polluted character. In the case where two groups come into contact and they don't want to hybridize, it is considered a compound. A compound - as in chemistry - is something "new confected by the creative conjunction of constituent elements, which can no longer be so easily separated out," [129] yet are still distinct in form.

   Ethnicity as a compound, in the context of antiquity, explains the way in which foreigners or non-Greeks were brought under the umbrella of Greek identity. An example of how this played out occurred during the reign of Emperor Hadrian. Under his rule from 117 to 138 AD he created Panhellenion, a league made up of "the original Greeks: Ionians, Dorians, and Aeolians"[130]. It was conceived with the intention to recreate a unified Greece that resembled, according to Hadrian, the 5th century BC when the Greeks took on the Persians. Kyrene was recognized as a place that had first been settled by Greeks in 631 BC and thus there were no barriers to its entrance into the Panhellenion,

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[127] Reger, Gary. *Ethnic Identities, Borderlands, and Hybridity*. 114.
[128] Reger, Gary. *Ethnic Identities, Borderlands, and Hybridity*. 114.
[129] Reger, Gary. *Ethnic Identities, Borderlands, and Hybridity*. 121.
[130] Reger, Gary. *Ethnic Identities, Borderlands, and Hybridity*. 122.

whereas Ptolemais-Barke was a member city situated in the Cyrenaica in North Africa and the dispute surrounding their acceptance by the Panhellenion exposes the extent to which descent mattered to the 'council'. While Kyrene "claimed a purity of Greek descent, Ptolemais-Barke, although admitted to the Panhellenion, was awarded fewer votes because its identity as a Greek colony had been watered down, so to speak, by the introduction of Makedonian colonists'"[131]. This comparison serves to demonstrate how the inhabitants of Ptolemais-Barke saw themselves as 'authentic Greeks' whereas outsiders "regarded them rather as hybridized, thanks to the introduction of Makedonian 'blood'"[132]. The implication of being put in the same category as Macedonia was significant, as Macedonians were seen as outsiders. The Panhellenion was therefore a mechanism by which city-states were afforded an ethnic identity, Greekness, if they were recognized as stemming from a semblance of commonality.

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[131] McInerney, Jeremy. *A Companion to Ethnicity in the Ancient Mediterranean.* 26-7.; Reger, Gary. *Ethnic Identities, Borderlands, and Hybridity.* 122.

[132] Reger, Gary. *Ethnic Identities, Borderlands, and Hybridity.* 122.

Concluding Thoughts

According to scholars, race is a modern conception because, as a worldview, it coincides with colonialism. Through colonial expansion and the encountering of populations very different from themselves, many have argued that prior to the "XVIth century, there was virtually nothing in the life and thought of the West that can be described as racist"[133]. This in and of itself as a claim is in stark opposition to the assertion that the classifications and ideologies of race were or have any universal or deep historical roots. The perceptions of indigenous people was greatly affected by the context of rising competitiveness and consciousness to dominate by Europeans during the age of exploration and expansion. In dealing with 'foreigners' or those who weren't traditional 'Europeans', languages of the groups who were establishing colonial empires in the New World and Asia described and categorized the 'others' using language. Further, it is important to note who is constructing the narrative. The conquered and "colored" peoples never took part in the invention of race, nor the compilation of racial classifications imposed on themselves and others. After all, history is written by the victors. Through the acceptance of the phenomenon of race as no more than a cultural construct invented by a select group of human beings, it then becomes easy to understand how it emerged from a set of "definable historical circumstances" thus making it "amenable to analysis"[134]. This enables us to analytically isolate the components

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[133] Pozzo, Dante A. *Racism and the Western Tradition*. 579.

[134] Smedley, Audrey. *Race in North America: Origin and Evolution of a Worldview*. 17.

which are central to race, examine their genesis, and ultimately discern the elements which led to their evolution.

Meaning attached to phenotypical differences in the Greco-Roman world wasn't discussed in a systematic way - not codified or institutionalized - yet as the texts demonstrate, a necessary ingredient for the prototype of race surfaced in antiquity. A veneer of us versus them, 'we' and the 'other', became ingrained in the subconscious as a consequence of human desire to construct and secure both a collective and self-identity. David Konstan argues that "with varying points of emphasis and changing composition, ethnicity retains the notion of 'consubstantiality of a community,' a common essence"[135]. Ethnicity is thus, the sense of belonging to a particular group and it develops out of a conscious process of identification within a singular social group. In other words, "ethnicity is situational, and it creates group cohesion by clarifying inclusion and exclusion"[136].

Thus, identity is not an accomplished fact but rather it is constantly being produced and reproduced through a framework of opposition[137]. In this way, the symbols of knowledge are constantly being re-constructed. "Identities are the names we give to the different ways were are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past,"[138] but this is not a past that is eternally set. The way one sees the self cannot be fixed in time, as it is situated in a context that is constantly the recipient of change. In

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[135] Malkin, Irad. *Ancient perceptions of Greek ethnicity*. 19.
[136] Malkin, Irad. *Ancient perceptions of Greek ethnicity*. 59.
[137] Hall, Stuart. *Cultural Identity and Diaspora.* 222.
[138] Hall, Stuart. *Cultural Identity and Diaspora.* 225.

sum, an identity is therefore a positioning in society that is always subject to the politics of the present, which function out of the past in an effort to alter the future. Things are transformative and dynamic, not static.

Thus, by doing a close reading of the color-language employed in various ancient texts, I found that humans were grouped through a method of identity classification that was deeply rooted in ethnic prejudice. Further, that this ethnic prejudice led to the formation of 'tropes' and stereotypes, otherwise known as proto-race, which over time paved the way for transitive xenophobia and 21st century racism. This process evolved out of at first, distinctions between Greeks and non-Greeks, Hellenes and Barbarians, and then into religion, who's a Christian and who's not a Christian, or who's with nature or without nature, and eventually molded into a system that codified these cultural differences into what today, we refer to as racial categories.

Epilogue: Some Thoughts on the US

"Now you guys are reality-based communities. But we make reality. By the time you've figured out, you know, what's wrong with that reality, we've moved on to the creation of another reality."
– Karl Rove, American Republican political consultant and policy advisor

National identity as a 'social construction' is one of the most profound examples that demonstrates the extent to which ideologies—more importantly those who wield and construct them—possess the power to construct 'realities' founded on false truths. If this sounds familiar, that's because it is. Donald Trump, in his 2016 campaign for the United States presidency, mobilized a considerable percentage of the American population against 'Muslims' based on stereotypes rooted in prejudice and ignorance. For those that understand the 'alternative' nature of these remarks, it shouldn't be hard to see that Trump's success in painting all Muslims as 'terrorists' would not have been possible unless certain ingredients were already available for him to use. He has capitalized on xenophobia and perpetuated false generalizations in the name of promoting a nationalist agenda. Despite the fact that most (I would like to think) people would agree that it is nonsensical to assert that every person who comes from a particular nation, or is of a certain ethnicity, thinks and believes the same thing, Trump won on this platform. I would argue that the context of his success can be understood as a consequence of how the American approach to identity has developed. The political rhetoric that is employed by the U.S. upholds a framework that simultaneously creates and perpetuates divisiveness by presenting difference as hierarchical in nature. In other words, the American identity is developed in the spirit of opposition, and thus it is organically embedded with a stratified notion of humanity.

From its founding up through modern day, American identity has centered on the question of citizenship. What once was simply a question of skin color has now been made more complex and accounts for other identifiers as well, such as ethnicity and religious affiliation. In light of this, while the history of the United States would be easier to digest without mention of racial categorization, void of this historical fact it would be incomplete.

Race has been the subtle undertone running and defining society ever since its solidification. This began in the 17th century and has extended into current times, white Americans have been afforded privileges in education, voting rights, citizenship, land acquisition, criminal procedure, and nearly every aspect of life. Groups excluded from this heightened status included Native Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans, as well as Hispanic and Latino Americans. Slavery, segregation, reservations, and naturalization laws, are just a few of the structured institutions that characterize the years during which America was forming itself. The founding fathers of the United States sought to separate themselves from Great Britain but as a consequence of this need to create distinction, subsequent surrounding questions of identity became more contentious when it came to the question of 'African American's'. Constructing these distinctions secured the ideological and legal conception of "race" because it naturalized, and thus softened, the rhetoric of slavery. In other words, through the provision of a rationality to the conception of a racially stratified human species, discriminatory policies and practices were justified.

Race and the idea of a racial hierarchy became an integral part of the development of the United States because the language and laws concerning it coincided with the birth of a new nation and its intended principles of liberty. At first, enslaved people held no rights and were treated as non-human entities - as property. The Jim Crow Laws, which were enforced between 1876 and 1965, implemented segregation policies that barred black Americans from engaging with whites and therefore from participating the structures of society which were considered 'white'[139]. "Separate but equal" was the motto and it extended into all public spaces, mandating that public schools, public places, public transportation, and even public water fountains, be separate for blacks and whites. Separation was emphasized but equality was neglected, and the treatment, as well as the accommodations, for 'blacks' were incomparably inferior in quality. The Jim Crow Laws were eventually abandoned but segregation just shifted in form to take on an informal method. Practices like redlining and blockbusting enabled the racial composition of neighborhoods and made it increasingly difficult for black people to gain access to health care, insurance, jobs, banking, and even supermarkets. The Fair Housing Act passed in 1968 eventually outlawed discrimination based on criteria of race, religion, gender, familial status, disability, and ethnic origin, and the Community Reinvestment Act, passed in 1977, made it a crime to vary lending criteria by community[140]. These policies, in their very essence, created an illusion of equal opportunity for all people regardless of skin color but the consequences of the previous century could not be erased

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[139] Pozzo, Dante A. *Racism and the Western Tradition*. 570.
[140] Gross, Terry and Richard Rothstein. 2015. "Historian Says Don't 'Sanitize' How Our Government Created Ghettos." *Fresh Air*.

with the swiftness of a pen. Black people were overwhelmingly underrepresented in all the major institutions and communities were still extremely segregated.

An examination of the U.S. Census is one example that illuminates how the concept of race has been socially constructed. It reveals how seemingly concrete categories of 'race' are far from impervious to change in attitude or political agenda. Since 1790 when the census was first administered, not a single category has stayed the same, proving further proof that race is not a matter of finite biological differences but rather an ever-changing social construction[141]. From 1920-1930, Mulatto was taken off the census, Mexican was added, and Negro was given to anyone with any black ancestry at all, otherwise known as the one drop rule. Outright racism in the form of legalized oppression was outlawed and so the dominant group, white people, were pushed to find new ways to maintain their power and control. Employing the field of science, people who identified as white conducted biased studies and tests that allowed them to legitimize their position because after all, you can't argue with science, right? The five categories for race currently on the census are 'white,' 'American Indian/Alaskan native,' 'Asian,' 'Black or African American,' and 'Native Hawaiian or other 'Pacific Islander'. This begs the question though, if the concept of race as biologically fixed in nature has been disproven, then why does society continue to perpetuate unnatural divisions amongst individuals by means of false classification?

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[141] Smith, L. Lewellyn M. n.d. *Race: The Power of an Illusion, Episode 3: The House We Live In*. California Newsreel.

In all contexts that race is understood, in its essence it still conveys the meaning of "profound and unbridgeable differences"[142]. In the United States this difference is articulated in situations across all institutional components of the social system: "differential education, training, and income; and informal restrictions against socializing, intermarriage, and common membership in various organizations, including, most visibly, in the church"[143]. In this way race has taken on unspoken guidelines of which all individuals follow, and the takeaway from its effects permeating all aspects of daily life is the message that this belief is understood as impossible to overcome under any and all circumstances. The system of race in the United States presents the dichotomy of black and white as inflexible racial categories. There exists no legal or social mechanism for an individual to change their race if they so wished to do so. "Race is a way of looking at the kaleidoscope of humanity, dividing it into presumed exclusive units and imposing upon them attributes and features that conform to a ranking system within the cultures that are defining the races."[144]

To get beyond the effects of racism, a system of socially constructed benefits accorded to whites over blacks, there needs to be an acknowledgement of our inherited structure that mechanically reproduces inequality. As a society, we need to walk before we can learn to run and that demands, though difficult to stomach, a recognition of the

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[142] Smedley, Audrey. 2007. *Race in North America: Origin and Evolution of a Worldview*. 21.
[143] Smedley, Audrey. 2007. *Race in North America: Origin and Evolution of a Worldview*. 21.
[144] Smedley, Audrey. 2007. *Race in North America: Origin and Evolution of a Worldview*. 22.

ways in which federal, state, and local policies have historically provided only white

people with a 'stairway to the American Dream'.

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