

CULTURE AND CONTEXTS:
RACE AND ETHNICITY IN THE ANCIENT MEDITERRANEAN WORLD

CORE-XX XXX
Spring 2017

MW: 3:30-4:45 (F: Recitation)
[Place]

INSTRUCTOR: David M. Ratzan (david.ratzan@nyu.edu)

Office hours: M: 1:00-3:00 (Place)

RECITATION: XXX (email)

Office hours: Day: time (place)

XXX (email)

Office hours: Day: time (place)

1. COURSE AIMS

This course will study race, ethnicity, and related conceptualizations of “the other” in the Greek and Roman worlds over the course of a millennium, from the 5th century BCE to the 4th century CE. The Greeks and Romans were acutely aware of physical and cultural differences between people, yet which differences were important to them and why? What role did the perception of these differences play in their personal, social, economic, and political relations? Moreover, does it matter that our concepts of “race” and “ethnicity” are essentially modern (and still evolving)? If so, why and how; and what does this tell us about our categories and the social uses to which they are put? In order to answer these and other questions, we will explore ancient Mediterranean categories of difference through Greek and Roman eyes, and then attempt to train that acquired vision back onto our own culture so as to see our categories “race” and “ethnicity” in a newly critical light. One could make a productive case study of race and ethnicity in any culture, but doing so with ancient Greek and Roman cultures is particularly interesting and valuable since they have been fundamental to the articulation of modern Western culture—and the concomitant Western projects of race and racism—from the 16th to the 20th centuries.

2. COURSE STRUCTURE

We will begin with some theoretical work on the categories of “race” and “ethnicity” and then probe the boundaries and resilience of these concepts through a variety of primary source material, including ancient medical, dramatic and historical texts; inscriptions; papyrus legal documents and private letters; and art and archaeology. The course proceeds more or less in chronological order, moving from classical Greece,

through the Hellenistic experience, to the world of the Roman Empire and late antiquity. Along the way, we will also consider how notions akin to race and ethnicity related to other, often more salient social categories in the ancient world, such as gender and status, and further how all of these categories did or did not combine to articulate and perpetuate systems of privilege (i.e., racism). Finally, we will from time to time take the opportunity to reverse our lens and ask how modern concepts of race and ethnicity have shaped the study and cultural authority of antiquity over the last century.

With respect to format, lectures will introduce major themes and debates and model source critical approaches to ancient evidence. Readings will there before be balanced between ancient evidence (primarily texts and images) and secondary scholarship. Recitation sections will most weeks include short assignments due in class and typically be devoted to the close reading and critical interpretation of primary source material, both ancient and modern. Recitation sections are therefore an integral part of the course, the laboratories in which we test concepts and arguments against evidence, e.g., the relationship of material culture (i.e., objects, food, dress, etc.) to identity; the seemingly deep, cross-cultural connection between stereotypes, laughter, and comedy; the applicability of labels and models like apartheid, colonialism, and racism to historical cultures; the use and abuse of classical antiquity in service of contemporary myth-making in television and film; etc.

3. COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

In order to pass the course, students must attend all lectures, complete weekly readings and assignments on time, and participate actively in recitation discussions. All grades will be assigned on the 4-pt, A-F scale and then weighted according to the schedule below. Work that is late will be discounted by a third of a grade for each day that it is late without an excuse (e.g., a B+ paper will be graded as a B- if it is two days late). Make-up exams must be approved in advance by the instructor and will be granted only on the basis of a verified medical condition or similarly serious situation (conflicting travel arrangements are not valid excuses). All missing assignments and missed exams will count as a zero. The grade of A is given only for clearly superior work, i.e., papers and exams that demonstrate not only mastery, but also analytical excellence and intellectual creativity. For the grading guidelines in the Core, see <http://core.cas.nyu.edu/docs/CP/4321/GradingGuidelines.pdf>.

Plagiarism and other forms of cheating will not be tolerated. They will result in a significant grade reduction, or, when warranted, failure to pass the course. Each case will be reported to the appropriate dean. Please see the College Core Curriculum Statement on Academic Integrity (<http://core.cas.nyu.edu/docs/CP/4321/AcademicIntegrity.pdf>)

The following course requirements count toward the final grade:

1. **Written work (50%):** Four short essays on assigned topics, building from 500 words for the first essay to 2,000 for the final essay. They will be worth 4.5, 9, 13.5, and 18% of the final grade, respectively. General instructions on successful academic essay writing in this course will be posted online and discussed in section when the first essay topics are distributed.
2. **Midterm Exam (15%):** The midterm exam will draw from the materials discussed in class and recitation sections and will test both general subject knowledge and synthetic engagement with the evidence and themes of the course through a combination of multiple choice questions, maps, short IDs, and essays.
3. **Recitation Grade (20%):** This grade, assigned by the recitation instructors, will be based on section attendance (5%), participation (5%), and successful completion of section assignments (10%).
4. **Final Exam (20%):** The final exam will be similar to the midterm and be comprehensive, i.e., it will cover the entire course.

4. COURSE POLICIES:

Students must attend all lectures, complete weekly readings and assignments on time, and participate actively in recitation discussions. If you are prevented from attending a recitation section, you must present a documented excuse (such as a doctor's note) to your recitation instructor. Extensions will not be granted unless there are genuinely exceptional circumstances that warrant them and they will only be granted if requested at least 24 hour in advance.

Race and ethnicity should and will be difficult topics in 2017, and localizing the discussion in the ancient world will not change that. Students are expected to approach the subject matter, each other, and the instructors with honesty and respect: the honesty to speak our minds and challenge each other to defend and refine interpretations and arguments in the spirit of free inquiry; but an honesty tempered by a respect that obliges us to be mindful of the deeply-held beliefs and life experiences of others and to listen to opposing points of view. It is very possible that someone will say something that offends. What honesty and respect then demand will depend on the circumstance, though a good policy in a class such as this is to assume that the offense was given unintentionally and to attempt to use it as an opportunity for dialog and discussion. This is not always possible, and in such cases—and indeed, in any case—you should feel free to share your concerns with your recitation or course instructor.

5. COURSE MATERIALS

The books below will be essential to the course and you are strongly recommended to purchase copies:

1. Herodotus, *Histories*. Trans. Aubrey de Selincourt, with an introduction and notes by John M. Marincola. Penguin Classics. ISBN: 978-0140449082.
2. Euripides, *Medea*. Trans. Diane Arnson Svarlien, with an introduction and notes by Robin Mitchell-Boyask. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2008. ISBN 978-0-87220-923-7.
3. Tacitus, *Agricola and Germania*. Trans. H. Mattingly, with an introduction and notes by J. B. Rives. Penguin Classics. ISBN: 978-0140455403.
4. Mary Boatwright, *Peoples of the Roman World*. Cambridge University Press. ISBN: 978-052154994.
5. Denise McCoskey, *Race: Antiquity and its Legacy*. Oxford University Press. ISBN: 978-0195381887

A short list of books will also be put on reserve for further reading and resources for final papers. Here it is worth pointing out two in particular:

1. Kennedy, Roy, Goldman (eds.). *Race and Ethnicity in the Classical World*. (Hackett, 2013). Sourcebook; relatively cheap to purchase.
2. Isaac, B. *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity*. (Princeton, 2004). Although not without its problems and idiosyncrasies, this is one of the major works of scholarship on this subject. It is thorough and very scholarly, to the point that it requires a good deal of patience for someone not well acquainted with classical antiquity. It has chapters on major cultural and ethnic groups. If you already know something about the ancient world, this is a book worth buying.

All primary readings and images will be available online, unless otherwise noted in the syllabus.

6. COURSE SCHEDULE:

WEEK 1

Jan. 23 (M): **Introduction**

Jan. 25 (W): **What do we mean by culture, race, and ethnicity?** In this class we will explore these terms and some basic theoretical constructs. We will also ask what it might mean to apply them to historical cultures in the ancient Mediterranean.

Readings: (*N.B.* This reading is also for the first recitation assignment)

- Hall, J. (1997). “The nature and expression of ethnicity: an anthropological view,” *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity* (Cambridge University Press): 17-33.
- McCoskey, Introduction, pp. 1-34.
- Omi, M. and Winant, H. (1994). “Racial Formation,” *Racial Formation in the United States*. 2nd ed. (Routledge): 53-76.
- Tishkoff, S. A. and Kidd, K. K. (2004). “Implications of biogeography of human populations for ‘race’ and medicine,” *Nature Genetics* 36” 21-27.
- Pew Research Center press release on changes in how the U.S. Census collects race and ethnicity data ([March 14, 2014](#)).
- Pew Research Center press release on the phenomenon of Americans changing racial self-identification ([May 5, 2014](#))

WEEK 2

Jan. 30 (M): **The Greek World.** A quick orientation to the people, places, events, and sources from Homer (ca. 750 BCE) to the Battle of Actium (31 BCE), and a little discussion of how we know what we think we know.

Readings:

- Hall, J. (2014). *A History of the Archaic Greek World, ca. 1200-479 BCE*, 2nd Edition (Wiley-Blackwell): Ch. 2: “Sources, Evidence, and Dates,” pp. 16-40.

Feb. 1 (W): **The Roman World.** A quick orientation to the people, places, events, and sources from Rome’s foundation (8th cent. BCE) to the Alaric’s sack (410 CE). We will also discuss periodization as a historical concept, its reality, its uses, and its pitfalls.

Readings:

- Veyne, P. (1993). “*Humanitas*: Romans and Non-Romans.” In Giardina, A., ed. *The Romans*. Trans. L. Cochrane. Chicago: University of Chicago Press): 342-370.

WEEK 3

Feb. 6 (M): **Ancient theories of racial and ethnic difference.** In this lecture we turn to study the vocabulary and theory of race and ethnicity in the Greek and Roman worlds. We will in particular consider theories of geographical determinism and measure them against some of the definitions we explored in the second lecture.

Reading:

- Ps.-Hippocrates, *On Airs, Waters, and Places*
- Vitruvius, *On Architecture* 6.1.1-12
- McCoskey, Ch. 1, pp. 35-80.

OPTIONAL READING: Issac, *Invention*, pp. 56-109; Kennedy et al., *Race and Ethnicity*, Chs. 3-5.

Feb. 8 (W): **Ancient representations of racial and ethnic difference.** Ancient peoples not only theorized about racial and ethnic difference; they also represented and deployed it for various cultural ends. We will have occasion to study many representations in this course, both poetic and plastic, but in this class we will introduce some of the basic visual vocabulary of difference and make a case study of the importance of one of our most salient contemporary racial indicia, skin color.

Reading:

- McCoskey, Ch. 3, pp. 132-166.
- Snowden, F. M., Ch. 4: "Toward an Understanding of the Ancient View," *Before Color Prejudice* (Harvard University Press, 1991): 61-108. *N.B.* Please be sure to study the images.

WEEK 4

Feb. 13 (M): **Becoming Greek, Inventing the Other.** An exploration of the polarities and dynamics behind the historical development of the "Greek" cultural identity in the 5th century BCE. We will attempt to build up a working definition of what being "Greek" meant (and what it did not). We will also pay attention to the invention of the "barbarian" and the way it was implicated in other polarities, such as male/female, free/slave, citizen/non-citizen.

Reading:

- Hall, E. (1989). *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-Definition through Tragedy*. (Clarendon Press): 1-55.
- Hall, J. (1997). "The discursive dimension of ethnic identity," *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity* (Cambridge University Press): 34-66.

Feb. 15 (W): **Herodotus and the Persian Wars.** The Persian Wars of the fifth century were formative experiences in the historical development of the Greek identity we explored in the previous lecture, and Herodotus's text is central to our understanding of it. Over the next two lectures we will

explore the history of this conflict and the way in which Herodotus writes about it.

Reading:

- Herodotus, *Histories* I.1-92; VII.1-24, 33-39, 44-60, 101-5, 138-44, 201-39.

OPTIONAL READING: Issac, *Invention*, Ch. 4, pp. 257-303.

WEEK 5

Feb. 20 (M): NO LECTURE: UNIVERSITY HOLIDAY

Feb. 22 (W): **Greek views of Persians.** We continue with our reading of Herodotus and pair this with other the depiction of Persians in contemporary Greek visual arts. Images will be provided online before the lecture.

Reading:

- Herodotus, *Histories* I.131-140; III.1-38, 61-88; VIII.40-41, 49-63, 67-93, 97-99, 107-12, 140-44; IX.15-16, 36-42, 53-64, 78-82, 114-22.

WEEK 6

Feb. 27 (M): **Propaganda or Pathos? Aeschylus's *Persians*.** This lecture will introduce us to Greek tragedy and its artistic, religious, and political significance in Athens. Aeschylus's *Persians* is a fascinating tragedy, not least for its adoption of a historical, as opposed to a mythological, theme. We will compare Aeschylus's depiction of the barbarian Persians to Herodotus's, and ask what it meant for the Athenians to watch the tragedy of their mortal enemy.

Reading:

- Aeschylus, *Persians*. Trans. I. Johnston ([online](#))

Mar. 1 (W): **Euripides's *Medea*.** In this lecture we will turn to a complex and justly famous play by another of Athens' leading tragedians, Euripides. In many ways, *Medea* represents a "perfect storm" of Greek alterity: female, foreign, non-citizen. We will explore how these differences are woven together in the figure of *Medea* and seek to understand what precisely Euripides was dramatizing for his fellow, male citizens.

Reading:

- Euripides, *Medea*.

WEEK 7

Mar. 6 (M): **Alexander the Great and the forging of the Hellenistic world.** Alexander III of Macedon invaded Asia, purportedly to avenge the Persian invasion of Greece more than a century earlier. He then proceeded to conquer in a brutal, decade-long campaign almost all the territory lying between present day Turkey and Egypt and India and Pakistan. Alexander's imperial project necessarily involved him in complex cultural politics, as he experimented with how to be king to all of his subjects, new and old. We will explore his cultural points of departure (i.e., his Greek education and Macedonian ethnicity); the iconic moments of culture contact and conflict in his career (e.g., the mass marriage at Susa); ancient and modern interpretations of Alexander's cultural aims; and the idea of "Hellenization."

Reading:

- Plutarch, *Life of Alexander* and *On the Fortune of Alexander*.
- Gilley, D. L. and Worthington, I. (2010). "Alexander the Great, Macedonia and Asia" In Roisman, J. and Worthington, I., eds. *A Companion to Ancient Macedonia* (Wiley-Blackwell): 186-207.
- Hall, J. (2001). "Contested Ethnicities: Perceptions of Macedonia within Evolving Definitions of Greek Ethnicity." In Irad Malkin, ed., *Ancient Perceptions of Greek Ethnicity* (Harvard University Press): 159-186.

Mar. 8 (W): **MIDTERM** (in class)

SPRING BREAK: Mar. 12-19

WEEK 8

Mar. 20 (M): **African-Americans and Antiquity: Race and Classics in the United States** (Guest Lecture: Mathias Hanses, Penn State University).

Reading:

- "Obituary Addresses on the Occasion of the Funeral of Prof. Wiley Lane" (1885)
- One other reading TBA

Mar. 22 (W): **Classics and the Culture Wars: *Black Athena* and the Martin Bernal Controversy** (Eric Adler, University of Maryland)

Reading: (NB. Waiting on the guest lecturer's selections)

- Possibly one short primary text
- 2 short secondary readings to be selected from:
 - Bernal, M. (1987). *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*. Vol. 1, *The Fabrication of Ancient Greece, 1785-1985*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
 - Lefkowitz, M. R. (1996). *Not out of Africa: How Afrocentrism Became an Excuse to Teach Myth as History*. New York: Harper Collins.
 - Lefkowitz, M. R. and Rogers, G., Eds. (1996). *Black Athena Revisited*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
 - Bernal, M. (2001). *Black Athena Writes Back*. Ed. D. C. Moore. Durham: Duke University Press.

WEEK 9

Mar 27 (M): **Ptolemaic Egypt: Race, ethnicity, and the lives of the Hellenistic 99%**. Ptolemaic Egypt was a complex place with respect to race, ethnicity, language, and culture. It is also one of the few societies from the ancient world for which detailed documentary evidence of everyday life survives and where we may see Hellenization at work. We will take a deep dive into the nature and evolution of Ptolemaic society and rule and then ask ourselves what the best model is for understanding it. Should we see it as a form of colonial rule? Was it a form of apartheid? What's at stake in picking one model over another?

Reading:

- Selection of documents (online)
- Bagnall, R. S. (1997). "Decolonizing Ptolemaic Egypt," in Cartledge, P., Garnsey, P., and Gruen, E. S., eds. *Hellenistic Constructs: Essays in Culture, History, and Historiography* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press): 225-241.
- Manning, J. G. (2005). "The relationship of evidence to models in the Ptolemaic Economy (332-30 BCE)." In Manning, J. G and Morris, I., eds. *The Ancient Economy: Evidence and Models* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press): 163-186.

Mar. 29 (W): **Race, Ethnicity, Information, and the State**. How do states use racial or ethnic information? Perhaps we had better back up and ask, why do

some states collect such information? In this class we will explore the relationship between government, identity, and information, particularly through the work of Marx and Foucault; and then make a comparative case study of censuses, ancient and modern, in order to understand the special place of race and ethnicity in systems of governmental control.

Documents:

- [UN Demographics and Social Statistics](#)
 - [US. Census form 2010](#)
 - [Brazil Census form 2010](#)
 - [Afghanistan Census form 2011](#)
- Hellenistic declaration: *C. Pap. Jud.* I 36 (Arsinoite, Jan. 23, 240 BCE; see online)
- Roman census declaration: *P. Oxy. II 255* (Oxyrhynchus, 48 CE)

Readings:

- Bagnall, R. S. and Frier, B. W. (2006). *The Demography of Roman Egypt*. 2nd ed. (Cambridge): 1-30.
- Clarysse, W. and Thompson, D. (2006). *Counting the People in Hellenistic Egypt* (Cambridge): 1-35.
- [Official racial categories and policy of the U.S. Census](#)

WEEK 10

Apr. 3 (M): **Black and brown bodies: A Classicist Manifesto.** (*Guest lecturer:* Dan-El Padilla Peralta, Princeton University).

Reading: (*NB.* Waiting on the guest lecturer's selections)

- Selection from: Padilla Peralta, D. (2015). *Undocumented: A Dominican Boy's Odyssey from a Homeless Shelter to the Ivy League* New York: Penguin.
- Possibly one other reading TBA

Apr. 5 (W): **Roman beginnings.** The Romans' ideas about their origins were far different from how Athenians imagined theirs. This class will explore the myths of the Roman foundation and early Republic that were current in the age of Augustus; and further what these stories the Romans told about themselves reveal their ideas of race and ethnicity.

Reading:

- Livy, Bk. 1.1-10
- Boatwright, Ch. 1

WEEK 11

Apr. 10 (M): **Roman imperialism.** What is the connection between race, ethnicity, and empire? We will take as our lens the Roman ritual of the triumph and the triumphal art and architecture that articulated the space of the Roman *imperium*. We will also begin to consider the notion of “Romanization” and what this might mean and if it is a useful term.

Reading:

- Horace, *Ode* I.37
- Beard, M. (2007). *The Roman Triumph* (Harvard University Press), Chs. 4-5, pp. 107-186.

OPTIONAL READING: Issac, *Invention*, Chs. 2-3, pp. 169-251.

Apr. 12 (W): **Rome and the Gauls.** The Gauls were Republic’s traditional enemies and so held a special place in the Roman imagination. We will take a look at the reality and the myth of the Gauls, the history of their relationship with Rome, their representation in Caesar’s commentaries and Roman art, and their ultimate incorporation into the Empire.

Reading:

- Caesar, *Gallic Wars*, Bk. 6: <http://classics.mit.edu/Caesar/gallic.6.6.html>
- Boatwright, Ch. 2

OPTIONAL READING: Issac, *Invention*, Ch. 11, pp. 411-426.

WEEK 12

Apr. 17 (M): **Rome and the Germans.** As Rome changed, so did the ways in which the Romans imagined the peoples beyond the boundaries of their power. In this lecture we will look at the history of Roman military and cultural contact with the Germans and consider how the imperial historian Tacitus used the tradition of ethnographic writing as a form of cultural critique of contemporary Rome.

Reading:

- Tacitus, *Germania*

OPTIONAL READING: Issac, *Invention*, Ch. 12, pp. 427-439.

Apr. 19 (W): **Rome and Greece.** Rome’s relationship with the Greeks was exceedingly complex. Rome’s contact with Greece went back to its very foundation, and Rome experienced a fairly constant anxiety of influence

from the third century BCE to the second century CE. In this lecture we will trace this dynamic history of cultural influence, adoption, competition, domination, and ultimately cooperation.

Reading:

- Juvenal, Sat. 3: <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/juv-sat3eng.asp>
- Boatwright, Ch. 3

OPTIONAL READING: Issac, *Invention*, Ch. 9, pp. 381-405.

WEEK 13

Apr. 24 (M): **Roman Egypt.** We have already taken a look at Ptolemaic Egypt. Now we will attempt to understand how the Roman imperial project in Egypt differed from the Ptolemaic one, particularly with respect to notions of race and ethnicity. We will also turn the telescope around and look at how Egyptians and Egyptian culture were viewed back in imperial center.

Reading:

- Selection of documents (online)
- Juvenal, *Satire* 15 (online)
- Boatwright, Ch. 4

OPTIONAL READING: Issac, *Invention*, Ch. 7, pp. 352-370.

Apr. 26 (W): **Jews in the Ancient World.** There were significant Jewish communities outside of the ancient Palestine, and in this lecture we will trace some of the interactions and stereotypes that developed over the course of the Second Temple and Roman periods. In particular, we will consider the Alexandrian riots and subsequent Jewish revolts under the Roman Empire as a cultural and political conflicts over Hellenization and Roman rule, and the impact those failed revolts had on Jews and Jewish communities in the ancient Mediterranean.

Reading:

- Tacitus, *Hist.* 5.1-13 (online)
- Select papyri (online)
- Boatwright, Ch. 5

OPTIONAL READING: Issac, *Invention*, Ch. 11, pp. 440-491.

WEEK 14

May 1 (M): **“And they are the ones who, beyond all other nations on earth, have found the truth.”** Aristides the Athenian, a second-century Christian apologist, uses the word *ethnos* here. Were the Christians a “people”? Did they have a culture and the other attributes of an ancient *ethnos*? If so, how; and if not, why was this a common way of talking about the early Christian movement? We will trace the rise of Christianity and ancient responses to it, including the persecutions, and the growth of a Christian identity and its engagement with traditional social and political categories.

Reading:

- Paul, *Romans*
- Boatwright, Ch. 6
- Denzey, N. (2002). “The Limits of Ethnic Categories.” In Blasi, A. J. et al., eds. *Handbook of Early Christianity: Social Science Approaches* (Altamira): 489-507.
- Schwartz, S. (2005). “Roman Historians and the Rise of Christianity: The School of Edward Gibbon.” In Harris, W. V., ed. *The Spread of Christianity in the First Four Centuries: Essays in Explanation* (Brill): 145-160.

May 3 (W). **Occidentalism: Teaching Greek and Roman Classics in China.** (*Guest lecturer:* Chun Liu, Peking University). Dr. Liu holds a PhD in Classics from UC Riverside, having written her dissertation on Greek tragedy, and is now an Assistant Professor at Peking University. She is a member of an international team translating Ovid into Chinese with commentaries. She will speak on what it means to study, translate, and teach Greek and Roman “Classics” in China.

Reading:

- Said, E. (1994). *Orientalism* (Vintage Books), Introduction, pp. 1-30.
- Two other readings TBD with lecturer.

WEEK 15

May 8 (M): **Concluding thoughts.**
Final Papers due.

Final Exam