

‘Black Cultures and Classical Education’ at Ohio State University

‘Black Cultures and Classical Education’, which I developed at OSU, confronts the history of how the legacies of Greco-Roman antiquity have been used in racialized discourses in the US, Africa and the Caribbean. In hopes of escaping the pitfalls of any in-group echo chamber, the course was designed not only under the heading of Classics but in conjunction with OSU’s African American and African Studies Department (AAAS), with which the course is cross-listed. In this paper, I offer an overview of the course’s development, content, and student impact.

The course is broken up into three units of different size: first, a medium sized analysis of race in antiquity (did the concept of race exist? If it did, was race conceptualized differently from modern norms in the US? Were Greeks and Romans white?); second, a short overview of the role of Greco-Roman learning from the European Renaissance to the fully developed colonial structures in three regions; and finally, about half the course is devoted to progressive engagements with Greco-Roman antiquity by Black writers, artists and activists from those same regions.

In terms of diversity and inclusion, this course offers two broad pathways: students already familiar with (and often enthusiastic fans of) Greco-Roman antiquity learn how important the material we study has been in both *oppressive* and *progressive* discourses about race up to the present moment, and students with little knowledge of (or, at times, interest in) Classics learn how central Greco-Roman antiquity has been to the history of Black liberation. Whereas many Classics courses aim to hook students with the joys of studying material from the

distant past, this class challenges students primarily to recognize how the post-classical legacy of Greco-Roman antiquity has operated as a vehicle for exerting racialized power.