

Classics and White Supremacism

In the last year, white supremacist groups have surged into national view, and their reliance on (mis)readings of European history in asserting claims for the existence of a pure white race has led them to increasing conflict with classical scholars. In this panel, three scholars examine the ways such far-right groups use classical antiquity to advance their political, social, and cultural agendas. Two patterns emerge: erasure and appropriation. In addition to diagnosing how and why the alt-right uses classical antiquity, the panelists seek to promote more effective modes of response from classicists.

The first paper takes DNA technology as its starting point. The use of scientific analysis in the study of ancient identity was brought to wider attention in the summer of 2017, when a study of the DNA of the ancient Minoans and Mycenaeans drew much comment from Greek neo-Nazis. At this intersection of science and humanities, our panelist outlines some of the costs of treating science as the premier arbiter of debates about ancient racial identity. The uncritical acceptance of race's alleged and "objective" foundations in human biology gives little recognition to the decades-long work by social theorists, historians, and even scientists themselves who have argued convincingly. In the recent debates over whether people with black skin color were actually present in Roman Britain, for example, the work of Black classicists, who have been interpreting the *meaning* of black skin color in antiquity since the 1970s was all but erased.

The second panelist demonstrates that far-right groups depend for their knowledge of the ancient world on scholarship out-dated by as much as two centuries as the basis for their opinions and claims about the ancient world. From the use of disreputable or disputed race science and physical anthropology to arguments based on a German or northern European source

for a Dorian invasion to convictions that race mixing led to the fall of Rome, these commenters demonstrate a pre-World War II mentality that belies the last fifty years of scholarship within the fields of Classics, Ancient History, and Archaeology. Given the breadth and depth of work and gains in knowledge, especially in archaeology in these decades, such (willful) ignorance is dangerous. The panelist concludes with possible reasons for the failure (or refusal) to engage with the most current scholarship, including ideological selectivity and the structures of academic publishing.

The third paper explores the appropriation of ancient sexual politics at the intersection of online white supremacy and online misogyny on popular far-right websites such as *Return of Kings* and *The Daily Stormer* and blogs such as *Chateau Heartiste* and *Vox Popoli*. Writers for these websites elide the immense differences between our society and classical antiquity to attempt to prove the incontestable value of patriarchy and white supremacy – and to argue for the reinstatement of those oppressive systems of power today. Their interpretations of the Classics should be approached not as readings of the ancient world, but rather as aspirational representations of the world that they wish we inhabited. White supremacists online idealize a model for gendered behavior that erases much of the social progress we have achieved in the last two thousand years, and they use ancient literature to justify their reactionary ideas.

As surely as the alt-right will continue to appropriate the past, we classicists must have at hand ways to combat such misappropriations. Each panelist provides a framework for thinking through the difficult subject of white supremacism and some strategies for how we may be able to make some headway in changing the dynamics of erasure and appropriation.