

Religion, Race, and Ethnicity in the Study of Antiquity

RELS 1600A

CRN 27334

Spring, 2022

(Version 1/6/2022)

The terms religion, ethnicity, and race are often used in discussions of the ancient Mediterranean. In recent years, however, they have been coming under increasing interrogation: Do the ancients themselves think in such categories? How did people in antiquity construct their own “identities,” and those of others? Can the categories be analytically useful for modern scholars? Given how loaded these topics are in our world, what ethical considerations are relevant for ancient historiography?

Goals

By the end of this course you should:

1. Be familiar with the primary theoretical works on religion, race, and ethnicity that are most useful to study of the ancient world;
2. Gain insight on whether or how different Mediterranean societies conceive of the categories religion, race, and ethnicity;
3. Be able to grapple with the ethical considerations of writing about race, religion, and ethnicity in the past.

I recognize that different students may want to develop additional learning goals (e.g., improve writing or presentation skills), and that those goals differ from student to student. You will be encouraged to develop, in consultation with the instructor, your own learning goals.

Instructor

Professor Michael Satlow, Religious Studies and Judaic Studies.

Canvas, Resources, and Electronic Devices

I recognize that electronic devices, like laptops (or even, on rare occasions, phones) can assist learning. Nevertheless, in my experience they tend, on balance, to hinder learning in the classroom itself. Accordingly, their use is not allowed in our class. If there are special circumstances, please contact me and we can discuss this privately.

I have not asked you to buy any books. All (or just about all) of our readings will be available digitally, mainly through the Canvas site. Since you should bring the readings for each class, and your notes on them, to class each week, that means **you will need to print them out, in advance**. This will be an expense (my guess is around \$50 for the semester), but still far less expensive than buying the books or a course packet.

Inclusivity

When you join this class, you are joining a team in which we all strive to help everyone individually achieve their potential. It is precisely the diverse perspectives that you bring to the

class that will enhance our success. This class is a “safe” space in which I want you all to feel free to take intellectual risks, to fail on occasion, and to support each other. We will be discussing difficult material with rigor. We should and will disagree with each other and be willing to argue our positions with vigor and integrity, but also with mutual respect and sensitivity.

Any student with a documented disability is welcome to contact me as early in the semester as possible so that we may arrange reasonable accommodations. As part of this process, please be in touch with Student Accessibility Services by calling 401-863-9588 or [online](#). Again, I am here to support you.

Covid Statement

Teaching, and learning, during a time of Covid is challenging, and there is no use trying to ignore that. A few points:

- I believe in the superior value of face-to-face learning, and will do everything that I can to prioritize it. Unless there are exceptional circumstances (e.g., the university closes or I have to isolate), we should count on meeting in person for our classes. I have found that trying to accommodate learners both in the classroom and remotely degrades the classroom experience, and so will seek to avoid doing so.
- I do not like mask-wearing in the classroom, and per current university guidelines I am not planning on doing so in the classroom while teaching. We will strictly adhere to university guidelines, so as of now you will have to wear your masks. When the weather improves we may try to have class outside so that we can unmask.
- Physical health matters, a lot. If you have even the slightest doubt about whether or not you have Covid, you should not come to class. Send me a note and I’ll work with you; you will not be penalized.
- Mental health matters too, also a lot. Covid has taken, and continues to take a mental toll, sometimes insidiously. If you feel yourself tottering, I urge you – **implore you** – both to find the help you need and to contact me at the first sign of trouble.

Time Expectations

Our accrediting body requires that we estimate the amount of time you will spend in this course and how you will spend it. All regular courses at Brown expect you to invest 180 hours. For this course, we will spend about 40 hours in class; you will read about 80 hours; and you will spend about 60 hours completing assignments.

Expectations

I want to create a learning community that encourages each one of you to challenge yourself; take intellectual risks; and to take responsibility for your own learning. I thus see my job as something akin to a coach. I will provide structure, encouragement (or a harder approach, if we agree together that would be more effective), and ample feedback to help you do the best that you can. Ultimately, though, your learning – and the learning of your classmates – depends on your own efforts.

Much of the learning you will do in this class will take place through classroom discussion of the readings. It is very important – for your learning and that of your classmates – that you come to

class prepared. I will be posting some discussion questions in advance for each class in Canvas (check the “Module” tab). Give yourself time not just to read but also to digest the readings for the week.

In order to help you take responsibility for your learning:

1. By February 9, you will submit a short, written proposal for your “deliverables,” with an explanation of how they will help you to meet your particular learning goals and accord with your learning style. Note that since this is a WRIT class, you must complete at least 10 pages of writing, with at least one re-write. For some, developing this plan will be relatively straightforward; graduate students, for example, will normally want to work on an article for publication (whether or not it is actually publishable), which would involve submitting a draft to me, presenting the project, and then rewriting the paper based on the feedback. For others, though, the range of possibilities is open. You may want, for example, to include several regular, short reading responses because you know that they help you to learn better. You can add a page to Wikipedia, develop a public-facing museum exhibit, or a podcast. If you are stuck, just ask me; the key is to find projects that will motivate you and help you achieve your learning goals. In any case, after you submit this proposal you will arrange to meet with me by February 9 to review and finalize your learning plan. If we need to meet more than once, that is fine as well. These plans are not set in stone, and can be changed by mutual agreement.
2. You will prepare a mid-term assessment that you will submit to me by March 16. You will then arrange to meet with me during one of those weeks to discuss your self-assessment. This will be a time for us go over your progress in the course.
3. At the end of the course, you will submit a final self-assessment of your learning for the semester, which we will then meet to discuss. At this meeting, we will also discuss your grade for the course. It will take place the week of May 9. We can do this over Zoom if you prefer (that is, you can feel free to leave campus before then).

You will, of course, have other assignments due based on your own learning plan. I will do my best to return these to you, with my feedback (but no grade), within a working week.

All assignments must be completed by May 6. The next week we will have our final conference.

I have never run a class in this manner before. Should I feel that it is not working, I reserve the right to modify this approach. I would very much prefer that I do not have to, though.

Schedule

Here is our tentative schedule. Always check Canvas for updates, links to readings, and study questions. We will not meet during Reading Week.

January 26	Introduction
February 2	Setting the Questions Readings: 1. “Critical Theory,” in <i>The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy</i> : https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/critical-

	<p>theory/. (This is a rather dense reading. Just read as necessary to understand how they are interpreting “critical theory” and what that definition could mean to historians)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. R. Kennedy, “Why I Teach about Race and Ethnicity in the Classical World” (2017): https://eidolon.pub/why-i-teach-about-race-and-ethnicity-in-the-classical-world-ade379722170 3. D. McCoskey, “What Would James Baldwin Do?” 4. D. Nirenberg lecture, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BaP70qLaoA (begin at 13:15)
February 9	<p>Ethnicity Readings:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. F. M. Barth, <i>Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Cultural Difference</i> (1998), 9-38, 74-85 2. S. Malešević, <i>The Sociology of Ethnicity</i> (2004), “Neo-Marxism: Capitalism, Class, and Culture” (chapter 3); “Sociobiology: Ethnic Groups as Extended Families” (chapter 6); “Anti-Foundationalist Approaches: Deconstructing Ethnicity” (chapter 10). 3. H. B. Levine, “Reconstructing Ethnicity,” <i>Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute</i> 5 (1999):165-180 4. J. M. Hall, <i>Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity</i>, “The Discursive Dimension of Ethnic Identity” (chapter 3); “Ethnicity and Archaeology” (chapter 5) 5. E. Gruen, “Did Ancient Identity Depend on Ethnicity? A Preliminary Probe,” <i>Phoenix</i> 67 (2013): 1-22.
February 16	<p>Ethnicity Reading:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A. Faust, “Future Directions in the Study of Ethnicity in Ancient Israel,” in T. Levy, ed., <i>Historical Biblical Archaeology and the Future: The New Pragmatism</i> (2010) (chapter 3) 2. K. Whitelam, <i>The Invention of Ancient Israel</i>, “Inventing Ancient Israel” (chapter 3) and <i>The Creation of an Israelite State</i> (chapter 4) 3. B. Halpern, Response to K. Whitelam, <i>Shafar</i> 16 (1997): 127-130 4. A. Berlin, “Jewish Life Before the Revolt: The Archaeological Evidence.” <i>Jewish Studies Quarterly</i> 36 (2005): 417-70
February 23	<p>Race Reading:</p>

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. R. Delgado, <i>Critical Race Theory: An Introduction</i> (3rd edition; 2017), Introduction (pp. 1-18); Chapter 5 (pp. 77-101); Chapter 7 (pp. 113-151) 2. T. Coates, “What We Mean When We Say ‘Race is a Social Construct’” 3. B. Isaac, <i>The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity</i> (2004), chapter 1 (pp. 1-51), chapter 13 (pp. 440-491) 4. G. Heng, <i>The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages</i> (2018), chapter 1 (pp. 15-54) 5. R. Kennedy, “Is There a ‘Race’ or ‘Ethnicity’ in Greco-Roman Antiquity?”: https://rfkclassics.blogspot.com/
March 2	<p>Race Reading:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. M. Bernal, M., <i>Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization</i> (1991), 1-73 2. M. Lefkowitz, <i>Not Out of Africa</i> (1996), 12-52, 155-175 3. Dialogue on <i>Black Athena</i>, <i>Journal of Women’s History</i> 4 (1993): 83-135 4. Donna Zuckerberg, <i>Not All Dead White Men</i>, 1-10, 45-88 5. Selection of primary sources in R. F. Kennedy, C. S. Roy, and M. L. Goldman, <i>Race and Ethnicity in the Classical World: An Anthology of Primary Sources in Translation</i> (2013), 35-51 6. Dan-el Padilla Peralta, “From Damocles to Socrates,”: https://eidolon.pub/from-damocles-to-socrates-fbda6e685c26#.z9fwc35oc
March 16	<p>Race Readings:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Tim Whitmarsh, “Black Achilles” 2. Sarah Zhang, “A Kerfuffle about Diversity in the Roman Empire,” <i>The Atlantic</i> (2017): https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2017/08/dna-romans/535701/ 3. Margaret Talbot, “The Myth of Whiteness in Classical Sculpture,” <i>The New Yorker</i> (October 29, 2018): https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/10/29/the-myth-of-whiteness-in-classical-sculpture
March 23	<p>Religion Readings:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. K. MacKendrick and M. Sheedy, “The Future of Religious History in Habermas’s Critical Theory of Religion,” <i>Method and Theory in the Study of Religion</i> 27 (2015): 151-174

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. B. Nongbri, <i>Before Religion</i> (2015), chapters 1-4 (pp. 15-84) 3. K. Schilbrack, "Imagining Religion in Antiquity: A How To," in N. Roubekas, ed., <i>Theorizing "Religion" in Antiquity</i> (2019), pp. 59-78
April 6	Religion Readings: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. D. Buell, <i>Why this New Race: Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity</i> (2005), 1-62, 116-37, 166-9 2. C. Concannon, "When You Were Gentiles: Specters of Ethnicity in Roman Corinth and Paul's Corinthian Correspondence" (2014), chapter 1 (pp. 27-46)
April 13	Religion Readings: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. S. Mason, "Jews, Judaeans, Judaism: Problems of Categorization in Ancient History," <i>Journal for the Study of Judaism</i> 38 (2007):457-512 2. C. Baker, "From Every Nation under Heaven: Jewish Ethnicities in the Greco-Roman World," in L. Nasrallah and E. S. Fiorenza, eds., <i>Prejudice and Christian Beginnings</i> (2009), 79-99 3. M. Satlow, "Jew or Judaeon?," in C. Hodge et al, eds., <i>The One Who Sows Bountifully: Essays in Honor of Stanley K. Stowers</i> (2013), 165-175 4. A. Reinharz, "The Vanishing Jews of Antiquity," in <i>Marginalia</i> (2014): https://themarginaliareview.com/vanishing-jews-antiquity-adele-reinhartz/
April 20	Open/Presentations
April 27	Open/Presentations/Conclusions