**The Endless Knot, Episode 52: Race & Racism in Ancient & Medieval Studies, Part Two: Responses**

**Transcription**

MARK SUNDARAM: Welcome to The Endless Knot podcast –

AVEN MCMASTER: – where the more we know –

MARK: – the more we want to find out.

AVEN: Chasing serendipitous connections through our lives –

MARK: – and across disciplines.

AVEN: Hi, I'm Aven –

MARK: – and I'm Mark –

AVEN: – and today we're talking about race and racism again. Today's episode follows on from Episode 51, which was made up of excerpts from interviews with Asa Mittman, Damian Fleming, Dimitri Nakassis, Donna Zuckerberg, Helen Young, Katherine Blouin, Rebecca Futo Kennedy, and Usama Ali Gad.

MARK: In the first part of the conversation, we talked about the problems with race and racism that are facing the disciplines of Classics and Medieval Studies. In today's episode, they discuss how they are responding to those challenges, and give suggestions for how people can try to make a positive difference.

AVEN: We hope that this will start productive conversations, and we would very much like to hear from you about your ideas and experiences. Have you had any successes? Any approaches you definitely wouldn't recommend? Get in touch on Twitter, or in the comments on the website, or contact any of the people we talked to directly. Their contact info is on the website.

All right, for this episode, we're drinking 'The Optimist' cocktails, because that's what we need to be, I think. This recipe is almost an actual recipe that I found on the Internet. There were multiple versions of this, though; some of them had fresh basil and ginger syrup and other – one had hibiscus syrup – but I decided we need realistic optimism. [laughs] So I made a fairly down-to-earth version with what we had, including a slight substitution of a little bit of Rose's lime for a little simple syrup, 'cause I ran out of simple syrup. So it'll be what it is. But basically, it is white rum, Fino sherry, lime juice, sugar syrup, and Peychaud's bitters. Which is why, Mark, it's pink.

MARK: Ahhh.

AVEN: It's the Peychaud's bitters.

MARK: It's the Peychaud's bitters.

AVEN: I'll put a link to the recipe in the show notes, but it's 'The Optimist' cocktail, by Difford.

So! Shall we try this? See if it makes us optimistic?

MARK: Mmm!

AVEN: Maybe too 'limey' with the lime and the Rose's lime as well. It's nice.

MARK: Yeah, I like it.

AVEN: Mmm. Quite refreshing tasting So you like this one better than the last one, eh?

MARK: Oh yeah.

AVEN: Okay, so that was good. Well, let's keep that optimism going, then, and turn to responses to the problem.

MARK: Many of the people we talked to stressed that the first and most important response is to acknowledge and talk about the problems that exist in both disciplines, as Helen Young, Dimitri Nakassis, and Damian Fleming explain.

HELEN YOUNG: I struggle with this question, honestly, I do, because most of my work is so focused on getting people to recognize that there's something wrong. And getting people to recognize what the problems are, that turning around and saying “What do we do about them?”

I guess my first answer to the question of, “What do we do about these problems?” is that people need to recognize and acknowledge that they are problems before there's anything else to do. So, in practical terms, I think that doing the kind of work that says, “Okay, well, look at how our discipline was constructed. Look at the history of our discipline and think about the legacies of that history in the present – on how we teach, on what we research, on how we think…

I think really engaging with where our disciplines came from is a really important step, and a lot of Medieval Studies people kind of still don't think about medievalism as something that's worth paying attention to. So I think it's very difficult to change what we do that's… problematic; it's very difficult to change what's problematic unless you recognize that there is a problem and what it is.

DIMITRI NAKASSIS: As a general statement, I guess I see that Classics hasn't really fully confronted its past in the way that other disciplines have. You think of the way Anthropology as a discipline has… tried to confront the past of the discipline. I mean, you can say that it's not adequate – I'm sure that it's not – but there's a real discourse that's identifiable, that's scholarly, where people really continue to struggle with it. And I think in that respect, we're behind.

So, I think these continued conversations are a really big step forward, and they need to continue, and it's never going to be over. I think there can be this sense like, “Oh, when are we finally going to get past this?” We're never going to get past this. [laughs] This has to be a constant conversation. It has to be, if we're going to retain any kind of cultural currency moving forward.

And I think it brings a vitality to the discipline. I mean, I know not everyone's going to be interested in doing it, but some people have to be interested in doing it. And I think it'll make the discipline more interesting as a result.

DAMIAN FLEMING: How I think many of us scholars of Medieval and Classical literature kind of just blithely accepted that our material was not political and that's just… we can't operate like that. We shouldn't have ever been operating that way, and I can look around and see all kinds of scholars who are [laughs] so much better at awareness than I am.

So, being aware of this, and then directly addressing it when we're dealing with these texts; finding out what do students expect to learn in a class on Old English, or what are they bringing to it? And directly addressing it, talking about things like when you rework the Middle Ages, what you're doing, or when you make choices to cast a movie based in the Middle Ages – like, what is going on? So that – we can't rely on our students to make these connections, necessarily. Even if it's not the focus of the entire class, that just to make it enough of a focus, make it a point of conversation, acknowledging our own biases when we're interpreting this literature and this material, and then, therefore, the biases of previous generations, even people we greatly respect or have been inspired by, like Tolkien and Lewis.

AVEN: Now, these are by no means the only disciplines that have faced these issues, as Katherine Blouin and Helen Young mention.

KATHERINE BLOUIN: I went to a conference at the British Museum two years ago, and there was a keynote speech on Religion in the Ancient World and Hellenistic and Roman Egypt. And it was great, and you know, there was a certain engagement with multidisciplinarity and post-colonial theory, and so on. And two friends of mine who are anthropologists came along, and I asked them after what they thought, and I asked them separately [laughs] and they both told me the same thing without knowing what the other had said, which was, “It was very interesting, but I'm quite surprised because we've had these conversations in Anthropology over 30 years ago.”

You know, and it was from a wonderful scholar in our field whom I highly respect. It was a great talk! So it truly speaks to how we need to catch up. There's a lot of catching up to do.

HELEN YOUNG: It's very like some of the things that – when I wrote the factbook on fantasy, I actually thought it wasn't going to be a medievalist project. I'd done my PhD in Medieval Studies, and there hasn't been an entry-level Medieval Studies job in Australia since 2003 in Middle English, which is what my PhD was in. So I knew there was going to be no job for me in the country, so I started sort of reorienting the work I was doing. And I sort of thought, “I'm going to do fantasy, I'm not going to do medievalism.” But they were so connected that I'm not really sure how I thought that would actually be possible. [laughs]

But I worked on that book on fan communities, because a lot of – you know, I've written about this recently on *In the Middle* – a lot of what's happened in Medieval Studies is very, very, like some of the things in science fiction and fantasy fandom getting on towards a decade ago, and it's a similar – I think it's a similar sort of thing, that fans, when you say, “Hey, this text that you love is deeply racist,” for many, many people the response to that is, “No it's not, I'm not racist, so this text can't be racist. You're racist for putting that out!”

MARK: Understanding the history of the disciplines helps us think about how we can – and should – describe our disciplines today. Here, Damian, Dimitri Nakassis, and Usama Ali Gad highlight different ways this can work.

DAMIAN FLEMING: I'm partly guilty of not being either as actively aware or actively addressing these kinds of issues in my classroom for the last ten years. I think especially, you know, people like me and Mark and other scholars who do old-school philology – we've always kind of collectively been aware of the fact that 19th-century philology grows out of, and alongside, European nationalism. The quest for Germanic literature goes hand in hand with the rise of what leads to World War II Nazism.

I would address this a little bit in classes like History of the English Language and maybe in Old English, but not as a pressing concern. You know, a couple of years ago I would bring these things up almost as like a historical curiosity: that a hundred years ago, people were talking about the Middle Ages, or using medieval literature, medieval Germanic literature in these potentially racist ways, without fully realizing until the last year or so that, no, this has never stopped. And it's perhaps even more intense now; we need to directly address it, because it's such an important issue.

DIMITRI NAKASSIS: So, I was having a conversation on Twitter with somebody about to what extent the entire discipline is implicated in a kind of narrative that maybe not all of us would agree with, right? That is to say, is the mere fact of being a classicist, or if you're teaching, I don't know, the objective and subjective genitive, isn't that somehow value neutral?

And you know, sure it is, but one thing I was trying to say is, Fred Jameson in *The Political Unconscious* has this whole thing about how periodization imposes narratives. If you periodize Archaic, Classical, Hellenistic, that really constrains the types of – if you use that periodization; if you don't question that periodization, then it really constrains how you think about the Greek past, the Ancient Greek past. Or Ancient, Medieval, Modern, right, is another sort of problematic one.

You could say a similar thing is kind of true of disciplines: that if you say, “Well, what we do is we do the Classics, and that's it's own discipline that's distinct from, you know, Religious Studies, and History, and Anthropology, and whatever else you like,” and that these texts are at the core of our discipline. That's not problematic in and of itself, but these divisions of disciplines do kind of constrain the way we think about the ancient past in some basic way.

And so, I think it's good for us to realize that our disciplines are important, they give us a lot of – they let us say a lot of things, they let us be specialists in weird little corners, [chuckles] like Linear B for me, that let us say really important and interesting things about the ancient world that we wouldn't be able to say if we were trained in some other way.

So, they're good, for sure – I'm not trying to destroy Classics at all. But they also are arbitrary, historically speaking, and they do affect the way that we think and the way that we act, and whom we talk to, and the way we self-identify, and the kinds of questions we ask. So, I think it is important for us to think about those things, because it wasn't like, decreed from on high that Classics shall be a discipline, and Anthropology will be its own discipline – these are all kind of historical accidents, and they change the way that we do the things that we do.

USAMA ALI GAD: Yeah, it's very interesting to see that I'm not the only person to say that, actually, Taha Hussein – you may recognize the name. He is a very influential Egyptian writer and intellectual. And he has also the same idea, that Greek and Latin heritage is our heritage, you know. And he has wrote a lot about this in his book, which is called – translated in English as *The Future of Culture in Egypt.* And this was in 1934, so that's quite a long time, you know.

But his ideas have not resonated in the divisional system in Egypt. But at least he is the one who is behind our department, in the whole Arab world you will not find any Greek and Latin department, except in Egypt, I mean, we have many departments. In the university in which I'm teaching, in Cairo University, we have a department, and also in Alexandria University, and other regional universities here in Egypt, so. But in the whole Arab world, you will not find any Greek and Latin, I mean, philological department. You will have History, you will have Archaeology, you will have Philosophy departments, but a philological department of Greek and Latin is only found in Egypt because of this person. And he was a professor of Arabic Literature, which is very interesting itself, you know.

DAMIAN NAKASSIS: So, for example, if we think that what's interesting about Greece is that it's part of this really dynamic eastern Mediterranean zone of interaction, and that we can see so much coming into the Greek world from outside – but maybe 'from outside' is not even the right way to think about it, right? That Greece is not it's own thing, but it's always part of this eastern Mediterranean network, so there's ideas, goods, and people, and languages moving back and forth, for millennia. That's great, but then how do we talk about that?

Well, I'm not an expert in Anatolia, frankly, I'm embarrassed at the lack of knowledge I have about Anatolia in basically all periods. [laughs] Like, Bronze Age, and Achaemenid Anatolia and all of that stuff. I don't know the languages of the Ancient Near East; I can't read Ugaritic or Aramaic or Akkadian, or any of that stuff. And so it puts us somewhat in an awkward position – we have Greek and Latin sources that talk about other places and other peoples, but if we really want to break out and think of our field as a kind of ancient Mediterranean environment and endeavour… that's challenging too, because most of us frankly just don't have the skills, whether they're linguistic or archaeological or whatever, to really speak to that in a robust way.

AVEN: But however difficult these topics are: issues of race or other problems in our texts, or in our scholarship about them, progress is not made by ignoring or covering them over. Damian demonstrates with an example of a missed opportunity, while Donna Zuckerberg says that the attitude of the majority of classicists, at least, has changed quite a lot in recent months.

DAMIAN FLEMING: So I'll start with a kind of negative exemplum, as we say in Medieval Studies, of a good friend of mine who works on rape in medieval literature. One of her professors, who's a Chaucer expert – we were talking about Chaucer and, like, Chaucer the historical person, we know was accused – or he settled an accusation of rape against him. You know, we have the court documents relating to this – very minimal court documents, but it's like, he paid a fine relating to a rape that he was accused of. And this is, you know, kind of a huge thing for a historical author who we don't know a wealth of material about his life, but we have a wealth of literature, much of which deals with issues of rape.

So I was talking to this friend of mine, kind of a junior scholar, and she was saying that her very famous professor would not allow discussion of the charge of rape against Chaucer in her classroom. And you know, it's like, “That's just the way it was, this will not contribute to… this doesn't influence his literature.” Which kind of blew my mind! But I guess at the same time, because Chaucer is not my primary focus, and I've not devoted my life to this literature, I kind of introduce it, and we spend a lot of time talking about it, and students are really interested in it. And, you know, maybe from a certain point of view they get too interested in it. I think that's the fear of, like, now this is going to overshadow anything they ever think about this man. Which I would imagine is the logic behind this older professor's refusal to allow discussion of it in her classroom.

But I think that's just a dreadful error to prevent discussion of these kind of issues in our classrooms, and that we should be doing the complete opposite, which is promoting them. So in a case like that, where there's unambiguous historical evidence which parallels all kinds of material in his literature, I think it's irresponsible to hide it from students.

DONNA ZUCKERBERG: When I first published “How to Be a Good Classicist Under a Bad Emperor” in November 2016, there was a lot of pushback that I experienced – really to the degree of, even, “Is this really a thing that is happening? Are white supremacists really interested in Classics?”

And then there were other people who were sort of thinking, “Maybe this is happening, but is it something that we should be concerned with?” And a year later, I would say it's a general consensus that it *is* something that's happening, and probably at least a large minority, if not a slight majority, think that it is something that we should be working to confront in some way or combat.

It's such a large and multifaceted problem, so obviously the solution will have to be equally multiform, and I don't think that any one person could be part of the entire solution. But whatever this solution looks like, it will have to be some combination of creating a more diverse and inclusive discipline professionally, in terms of the makeup of the professoriate of classicists, and also working to have a more inclusive and diverse set of students… bringing in a larger variety of perspectives about the ancient world and what the ancient world looks like... I think that the push to make sure that when others are trying to represent the ancient world, or classical antiquity, as white, the push to say, “Well, this is not just about Ancient Greece and Rome, it's about Egypt, and Mesopotamia, and all these other places,” is a very healthy one, and also working to bring in more female perspectives, more slave perspectives. So that's all really inside the discipline.

MARK: Although the problem is large, many solutions may start with small-scale individual actions, suggests Katherine.

KATHERINE BLOUIN: I tend to believe in small action, like you do what you can, in the way you can, you know? And I believe that the sum of small actions will lead you farther than having really too grandiose ideas. So, I have a lot of small ideas, you know, and I'm trying to implement some of them in the way I teach and I conduct research, so I think, well… if you're teaching Ancient History, or Classics, well, how can you engage with issues of the attraction between imperialism, race, and ancient literature or ancient history in your classroom?

Now what I've started doing is, for instance, in seminars I add a first – I'm now systematically planning one or two weeks at the beginning of term where we look more at the historiography and at post-colonial approaches to the topic. There's not a lot done, there is more and more, but there's still a lot to be done, so sometimes I will, you know, they'll have to read stuff outside of ancient history. But that's not bad, you know? I think it can be inspiring to them.

So you know, you can do that, you can approach certain topics that allow for these conversations and that are more focused on ancient dynamics in your syllabi. You know, we have quite a bit of freedom in general in the way we develop our courses and we're very fortunate for that.

So I think this is something that everyone who teaches can do. People who are asked to, you know, revise or write textbooks for high schools, maybe try to have a bit more firm conversations [laughs] with publishers to take out all the crappy stereotypical stuff and put in there more updated research and conclusions. Or something which I haven't done but I'm interested in doing in the future is maybe volunteering a bit more as scholars to be in conversations with people who develop curriculum at the high school level.

I also think that initiatives like social media presence and blogs are a good way to generate conversations both within and outside of the field at the same time, right? Because anyone can listen to your podcast, anyone can go on blogs or on Twitter, and this can be a way to slowly, slowly – [unclear – 21:34-5], as they say in Egypt – change things. And then there's obviously the research, you know, what are you working on? How do you engage with post-colonial theory?

AVEN: As professors, of course, many of our interviewees focused on how they could use their roles as teachers to address these problems. From new objectives, to new approaches and subjects, to a more open discussion of the underpinnings of the fields. Damian, Asa, Dimitri, and Rebecca give examples of how they incorporate these topics into their teaching.

DAMIAN FLEMING: Really, over this last year, maybe even during the summer leading up to this fall, just kind of having all these personal realizations and awakenings and, like you said, things that we almost certainly weren't thinking of because of our own kind of privileged position… being aware of it, and then like, readdressing – talking about things in a classroom.

So I'm teaching first-semester Latin, and I'm using Hans Orbergs's *Lingua Latina* series, which is life in a first-century Roman household. And so they beat their children, and they own slaves, and they talk about relative ugliness and prettiness and things like this – I mean, not to mention the fact that because I'm doing a kind of spoken Latin, it assumes that everyone in that classroom is going to have a gender identity that we can pinpoint together, like choose a binary gender, and I mean, just, in the first weeks of class, I immediately realized standing in front of my students, this is way more complicated than I guess I've thought about these things in the past. And my way of dealing with it is to, you know, not – not address it, which is to say, I address it, not just let it go by, so you know, talk about the fact that Classical Latin as we have it is an extremely gendered language, both grammatically, but then it also assumes, you know, world view of biological gender and that, you know, this is not ideal for 21st-century students to talk about themselves. And for that matter, talking about the daily life things that in this textbook that was originally written in the… 60s, I guess, by a European man that, like, certain things that are kind of played up for humour, like brothers punching sisters, and parents beating children, and teachers beating children, that these are things that we don't need to read it the way that a mid-20th-century Danish man wrote it, that we can say, “This is kind of messed up when they're doing this,” and you know this character, the dominus, the lord of the household is not a good person because he's kind to his slaves, like, it's problematic for a human to own other humans, and it's okay to talk about this, and we should talk about it, which has actually made the material more fun, you know, questioning, is he an upright master?

And you know, like, I will even suggest, I'll be like, “There is no such thing as a good owner of other human beings.” But kind of inviting students to think about it, not the way the book is written, which is from the point of view of the family, but from the point of view of other characters, especially coming out of – this summer and the conference of the International Society of Anglo-Saxonists, so getting ready to teach Old English again coming right out of that, you know, I was like, hyper-aware of these issues, so my first day of Old English I did something new. Usually my first day of Old English is a lot of performative, doing Beowulf in Old English and kind of wowing them and getting them excited for the intellectual labour that's gonna be coming up.

Whereas this semester my main interest was acknowledging these types of issues, so instead I gave them some words and just had them jot down the first things that came to their mind. So words like 'medieval' and 'Middle Ages,' and one of the most important ones was 'Anglo-Saxon,' like, "What does that word mean to you?” Because at the conference one of the presenters pointed out – she worked at the Sutton Hoo tourist site, and one of the most common questions they got in the comment box that people would drop off after they visited was, they did not know what was meant by 'Anglo-Saxon.'

It seems that is not a useful term for the general public. So, we who study it, this is a time period in a specific place, and so, medievalists… if you study England during these years, you call yourself an 'Anglo-Saxonist.' But it seems when we're addressing a larger public, it doesn't seem that even a British public, they don't think that, they don't think the way we think, so we need to make sure we're using terms that make sense to them.

Because the term 'Anglo-Saxon' is often very thinly veiled code for a particular type of whiteness, both in the United States and in Great Britain. And most of us – I think the vast majority of us – people who teach this material, we don't want to be perceived as promoting – that's not what we mean when we say 'Anglo-Saxon,' so we need to address it, and make sure our students understand we're not talking about that, we're talking about *this*. But acknowledge that this does exist, and is used in these ways, that this other use of it.

The first hour of the semester was just spent kind of like unpacking the terms that we use for talking about – and then, once we'd talked about it a little bit, I told them explicitly why I was doing this, because of this use of medieval material for racist purposes, which has no place in my classroom. That's how we started the semester, and if on some chance, someone was there because they wanted that, let 'em know that they will be disappointed and maybe they shouldn't take my class. [laughs]

ASA MITTMAN: We do have an obligation – and I think this is where a bunch of the pushback has come from people in the field – we have an obligation to explain what we mean when we use these terms, and also an obligation to explain to students how these things intersect with out current world now.

I have my own kind of idiosyncratic terminology that I use for this – and I realize that this is not how the terms are really used or anything, but this is what I think in my head is that, I think about antiquarians and historians. And 'antiquarian' is the term I use to describe people who are interested in the past as a kind of curio, as its own separate little object of fascination, whereas I think of historians as people who have a kind of binocular-vision: one eye on one thing and one eye on the other, always looking at the past with an eye toward the present.

'Cause otherwise, what's the point? Yes, all right, the past was interesting, but it is interesting because we live in the present, and in many ways we live with the echoes and ghosts and monsters of the past.

DIMITRI NAKASSIS: The other thing I'm doing, you know, it's a small thing but I think it's a useful thing, is thinking about how I want to incorporate this into my teaching. So one thing I'm doing next semester is I'm teaching a class that I'm, at the moment anyway, very ill-prepared to teach, but I'm going to do a lot of work to get there – on sort of race and ethnicity in the ancient world. So, looking at the ways that Greeks and Romans talk about different people, different cultural practices and different – the way people look, and why people act certain ways, read some Hippocratic stuff, read Herodotus and Tacitus and so on.

And then also think about, in that class, to think a little bit about how the Greeks and the Romans themselves were received into Europe, basically. So the sort of reception of the Greeks and Romans as *ethne,* or whatever, peoples, right? Into the sort of European story, European master narrative.

And I was inspired to do this because I saw Denise McCoskey give a talk. Denise has a book called – I think it's *Race, Antiquity, and Its Legacy* or something like that. She gave this great talk that I saw about what it's like to teach this stuff, you know, it's what she works on, the way her students react to it. One of the things she points out – it's kind of what I thought was really interesting was that her students were much more receptive to talk about race in an ancient context because there was a little bit of distance. You know, like, in Sociology class where you're talking about race in 21st century America, there can be a kind of reticence for students to talk. If you're looking at another culture, it gives you a little bit of distance; you can relate it to things now, feeling a little bit [sighs] safer somehow.

So I think it's a way to kind of move conversations forward in a very general sense. That is to say, in a sense that embraces modern discussions. But that also points out to students how complex, how *really* complex the ancient world was in this regard, and how different their ways of thinking about it were, you know? Like, I think one of the things that Denise and others were talking about after her talk was that our students understand that different cultures have different sexualities, right? That, like, Greco-Roman sexuality was not the same as modern sexuality. But maybe they're less equipped to think that Greco-Roman racial categories are equally foreign and different. They're shaped by historical forces and all of that.

When I was a grad students and I was applying for jobs, I thought, “It'd be fun to teach a class like this,” but I don't think I realized what's so interesting about it, you know? And I think some of the stuff that's been happening recently has led me to think a bit more critically about the value of teaching a class like this.

REBECCA FUTO KENNEDY: One of the things you realize, though, is that if you teach it using only the well-known, tried and true texts, you get a very skewed view of how the ancients understood these concepts of race and ethnicity, and in fact it's hard to say even whether we can call them 'race' and 'ethnicity' until you really dig in and look at things. You can't just teach Herodotus and Hannibal and Sallust's *Jugurtha* and some things, you have to really sort of go off the beaten path and find these places where they live.

So, that's when I started working on the sourcebook on race and ethnicity, when I discovered that some I knew, Sydnor Roy, was teaching Temple's longstanding race and ethnicity class, I said, “Hey, do you want to do this sourcebook with me?” And so we ended up doing that, and then my spouse, Max Goldman got looped into it because he was in the office with me one summer while I was trying to translate *Argonautica*. We brought him on board to translate a bunch of the Latin stuff, and so the sourcebook on race and ethnicity in the ancient world was born, and when it came out in 2013, not a lot of people were teaching the course, but the press had the foresight to see that people might, and now of course the world has sort of caught up to the idea that this stuff still matters.

Well, I mean, obviously I would say go out and get the sourcebook! [laughs] Do it! And use the resources that – I know the medievalists are building this wonderful bibliography online, I've been building a bibliography, I'm putting my syllabi up – contribute your syllabi if you have them, so we can make these resources bigger. So I would say start with the resources that are starting to become available. I think that's a first step, right?

Secondly, don't be afraid to contact people. If you read a blog post, or if you read something that people have written – why is it always the haters that contact us? [laughs] If you're actually interested and you see us doing something, or you see an article, or you see a comment or something, feel free to – we're happy to share the resources that we have available to us, and the ideas.

The second thing, I would say, is to just read. I always tell students when they're reading ancient sources that you need to come at it with two perspectives. One is, come at it from the perspective of – “They are not like us. These are foreigners. These are aliens. They're foreign to us.” But also at the same time, keep your – in the back of your head that they're not *unlike* us either, if that makes sense. Because I think it's easier for people to see where the ancient and the modern come together, if they can simultaneously recognize that they're both foreign and the same. The same in that have prejudices and those prejudices have shaped our prejudices, simply because of the way that classical education was utilized.

I think that's an area that people should really be thinking about, as where did Classics – how was Classics used? I think we as a field need to be more attuned to how Classics has been used. When we do classical reception, we need to stop thinking about theatre productions, and we need to start thinking about American education, American science, the use of Classics as not just a gatekeeper but also as an actual tool for creating the structures of racism in our country. And be open to that idea.

And then, recognizing that there are a lot of things that the ancients do, because they are different from us, that provide us with different ways of thinking about race. There are a lot of texts from antiquity, and this is what I mean by getting off of Tacitus and getting off of just Herodotus, and exploring into a much broader array of texts, which things like my sourcebook and – me and Sydnor and Max – and then other people who are trying to get more translations out there of less mainstream texts – is that there are actually alternate views. [laughs] Alternate approaches to these ideas of how you structure, how you think about group identities, that can actually be really useful in helping deconstruct.

So, having two eyes at all times – one, the complicity of the field, and two, also, the way that the actual diversity of the field as the world that we study existed, can help mitigate that complicity. So, I would encourage people to just read broadly. Start with the source material that's available broadly, and get out of the 19th century and the early 20th century. If I could say anything to academic publishers, especially of articles and things, I would say “*Please*, the only things that are open access tend to be racist 19th-century, early 20th-century tripe, and bad translations of these texts that are imbued with those world views. Please make things [laughs] more open access so that we can get access to better – have the material be more accessible to the public.”

And then I would also say to people in the field itself: “Be more open to public scholarship if you're working in these areas.” You can do public scholarship – I think there are some people out there who are doing public scholarship right now that is not intellectually lacking. This idea that you have to dumb things down for the public is not true. [laughs] You just have to say it differently. So I would say to people in the field: “Just do it! Engage in these conversations, and be willing to learn from people who have done this as their expertise instead of trying to just shut it down.”

And, I think, we need to rethink, maybe, in the field itself how we teach. Not just the material that we teach, but how we approach it. Whether it's teaching Latin, or whether it's teaching Greek history or Roman history or Greco-Roman lit, what texts do we select? What conversations do we open up? How do we structure the themes of our classes? Do we treat women as its own day, you know, do we treat race as its own day separate from the sort of everyday life of slaves – do we *only* treat it with respect to slaves, or do we actually talk about it outside of that dynamic, especially when you think about Rome. And are we explicit in basically saying – and do we recognize the difference between race and ethnicity in the contemporary context, and race and ethnicity in an ancient context?

I think that's one of the biggest places that we ourselves need to go and look at other fields, and those other fields like Anthropology and fields who are dealing with race theories and race issues, they should come and talk to us as well, it's a two-way street. Dismissing the classical world as dead white men is not productive. And the question we should actually be asking is how did it become this idea that the ancient world was just a bunch of dead white men? It's a much more interesting question than dismissing it.

ASA MITTMAN: So, I teach the big sweeping first half of the 'Western' art survey – problematic scare quotes around 'Western,' et cetera – but in a process of self-flagellation, each time I teach it, I have a unit right around the middle of the semester where I cover ancient Jewish and early Christian art under Rome. And I started several years ago having this be an essay midterm in the middle of a class that's otherwise exam-based. And what it does, is it draws out all the latent antisemitism in the room.

Now, I want to be absolutely clear: the vast majority of my students are good and decent and caring people, and do not hold consciously any kind of animus toward Jewish people. I firmly believe that. And yet, I will read dozens of essays that contain mild forms – if that's really a thing – of antisemitic ideas and misunderstandings and tropes. I see, for example, lots of essays that say, “When Judaism became Christianity,” “When Judaism evolved into Christianity,” “Jews, who follow the teachings of Jesus, who was their Messiah...”

Even mild things like ideas about the 'Old Testament,' which is a Christian appropriation of Jewish scripture explicitly read against Jewish intent for Christian purposes, right? So Jews do not use the Old Testament, Jews use the Torah or the Tanakh, they use Jewish scripture, the Midrash, call it whatever you want, these various texts that they have, but they are not the Old Testament, which is a Christian construct and reuse.

So – [sighs] why do I do this to myself, because they're painful to read sometimes? I do it because it's an opportunity, because otherwise I don't have a platform to say, “Hey, everybody, I know you're all wonderful, loving, great people, and I have great affection for you all, and I'm all glad you're here… here's the ways that you're antisemites.”

And so it's an opportunity to have a conversation with them about it, in, I hope – really, I joke about, I don't actually call them antisemites. But I hope that it's an effective way of raising these issues and saying, “All right, so here's some things I noticed in a whole bunch of the papers. People said 'this,' which is problematic for this reason. People said 'that,' which is problematic for that reason.” And so, while it is no fun for me, it's an opportunity to take these things a bit head-on.

And this is something that I am trying to find more ways to do, I mean, I will be perfectly frank, why is it antisemitism that was the thing I've been already doing this with for years? Because I come from a Jewish background, and so I was more sensitized to that, I think, than I was to other forms of subtle bias. I mean, obviously, you know, out-and-out racism is easy to spot all the time, but I wasn't thinking about, for example, we were talking about before, the resonance of the term Anglo-Saxon, say. Just that wasn't on my radar in the way that the equally subtle use of 'Old Testament' is on my radar, and has been for a long time.

And so, I'm gonna do, I think, one of the lessons of our current moment – one of the necessities, one of the strategies of our current moment – is that we all must get out of our own particular identity groups and stand up and show up and speak up for *all* the marginalized groups, whether or not we have a personal or familial connection to them. It is not enough for, say, a Jewish professor to make sure that his students figure out some of the problematic legacies of medieval antisemitism. It is incumbent on the same professor to make sure they also learn about the problematic legacies from the Middle Ages: sexism and homophobia and other forms of racism and other forms of culture bias and prejudice that permeate the modern world.

MARK: It's very important that these changes don't only come from those who are affected by the problems. Everyone in the field is implicated, and it's everyone's responsibility to work to make things better, as Asa, Rebecca, and Donna emphasize.

ASA MITTMAN: We, I think, have an obligation to not quote-unquote “Leave it to,” say, “medievalists of colour to deal with issues of race,” and “Leave it to Jewish medievalists to deal with antisemitism,” and “Oh, well, surely I don't have to write about women, female medievalists will write about women!”

We've all got an obligation to get in the game, not just for our own various intersecting identities, but more broadly, I think. It's the only way we're going to make progress.

REBECCA FUTO KENNEDY: It's the women in the field who are leading this battle, and I don't think it's a coincidence, but it tends to be, like I said, it's the men in the field who [laughs] tend to still get the recognition for it.

And high school teachers too, they're on the front lines – we need to listen to them and give them resources that they can use to ensure that the diversity of the ancient world is open to people. You know, as my friend who's a Roman historian in our field, who – she works on migration and immigration and colonialism, she doesn't really care about – she said to me, she goes, she was like, “I don't care about these public debates. Is it bad that I don't?” 'cause she's Indian, and she says, “Is it bad that I don't?”

And I said, you know, “No, you do you, you do migration and colonialism, that's a different thing.” And she does the Roman provinces. And she said, “Good, because,” she goes, “I don't want to feel that as a brown person, I need to do that labour, to educate others.” And so I think on the one hand, you want to have representation, but on the other hand, you know, sometimes that labour needs be done by us.

AVEN: One reason that white classicists and medievalists have a responsibility to speak out is that the backlash against them tends to be less than against people of colour, or those who can be identified as Jewish, or in some other way 'othered.'

DONNA ZUCKERBERG: I've received many pitches about topics related to white supremacy and Classics that writers have later withdrawn because they've been too worried about the pushback, and I'm very sympathetic to that.

HELEN YOUNG: I've never really had, since I finished my PhD, a chance to teach a Medieval Studies unit, or a medievalism unit, but I've done quite a bit in the last five years or so, I've done quite a bit of guest lecturing into medievalism units, into some cultural studies units, things like that, and talking about – usually, say, a text like *Game of Thrones*, or medievalist video games, or something like that.

And the classroom's always interesting because there's always pushback, so I've never had a class where there wasn't at least a few students saying “No, no, no, you're wrong, the Middle Ages were white, but that's just the way it is. Why are we talking about this?”

But then you also have the students who are open to ideas and start to see, and sort of will come up to you at the end and say, “Oh, oh, now I get it, it's this thing!” or, “Oh, it's just like this other thing!” So, I mean, to me the classroom – and I've also heard stories from people who have, say, used a blog post of mine or something in a history classroom and said, “Oh, yeah, there were some people who were really upset by this... you must be doing something right.”

You know, you can't sort of teach these ideas, and you can't question that fundamental belief in the whiteness of the Middle Ages without having pushback. I've certainly never received the kind of terrible abuse and harassment that others have, and this is something that I've said before as well, you know, I've never been trolled from anything that I've said or published online. I'm not inactive on Twitter, and so, a week or two ago I did an interview with David Perry, and he wrote it up in Pacific Standard about these issues, and I got, I don't know, four or five people tweeting to me about it, but it was – there was nothing abusive in it, I certainly wasn't targeted by anybody, whereas a medievalist of colour writing and saying the same things, or anything similar, there's absolutely no doubt that they would be targeted, harassed, trolled, doxxed…

A couple of years ago, I did a conference panel with Dorothy Kim and Jonathan and a few other people, and two of us on the panel talked about teaching race in the classroom. We were both white – and *Dorothy* got trolled, as a result of it. But neither of us did. And I thought that was a fairly good encapsulation of what the situation is like as a white medievalist talking about race, that it's a much safer thing for me to do than it is for a person of colour.

REBECCA FUTO KENNEDY: Of course, as a white person – interestingly, right, so I've written stuff for *Eidolon* in the popular context that is not necessarily nice to white supremacists, I've been sort of blogging about them and all sorts of things, but I haven't gotten a lot of the public pushback that you see from others, and it's an interesting thing.

In part, I had avoided Twitter for a very long time, and I think that was one thing, and when I did join Twitter, I imported from a friend of mine – who's a Holocaust scholar – her block list, which was over 110,000 people strong. So I had already sort of weeded out some of the elements [laughs] earlier. But I think there's something to be said for the fact that unlike Donna, and unlike Sarah, I don't have any recognizably overt ties to being Jewish; the antisemitism that seems to accompany talking about race and ethnicity in the ancient world on a platform, I don't think that – it's not a coincidence, you know, of course they don't know that I'm married to a Jew [laughs] but, whatever – but I've got this Kennedy name from my previous marriage that sort of shields me in some ways. And then my middle name is Eastern European, so I've got sort of some protections built in, because I found it was really interesting when I was looking at, and tracking, particularly where the “We Condone It by Our Silence” article went, I was not the person who was being bashed. Donna was, for publishing it. Not me for writing it.   
  
So, I think there's something to be said that I've been able to be somewhat insulated simply because they're not – other than the fact that I'm a woman – maybe some of them don't know how to get at me in the easiest manner. So I think there's a benefit there.

Secondly, [sighs] I would say in terms of teaching, one of the things I find really interesting is that I have a really great response from the students. I have, the ten years now that I've been teaching this class, I had one student who said racist things in class, and other students, like, noticed my facial expressions as they happened, and so people felt like, you know, it was okay, that I wasn't going to let it slide by.

But I've never had any issues on campus with my students, or any of the students here, thinking that I'm some sort of, you know, lefty lunatic indoctrinator, so that's been nice. In fact, my class always has waitlists that are as long as the actual class roster, and I always have to over-enrol the class whenever I teach it. I think part of that is, we just have a campus culture where students are open to these things. It's a small liberal arts college, right, it's not a big state school. But we've had our own issues here with race, and the campus response to an incident that we had about ten years ago to some explicit racism on campus was, “Well, everybody needs to learn more about racism.” [laughs] And it was a student-led initiative, it was not top-down.

I think the other thing, too, in terms of my personal experience of working on the material, I've sort of back-doored a lot of scholarship. If I had been trying to get some of the stuff that I've published on this material through more traditional roots, I don't know if it would have worked.

So, 2015, I published – along with my colleague Molly Jones-Lewis – *The Handbook of Identity and the Environment in the Classical and Medieval Worlds*. And it's on race and ethnicity in the ancient world and environmental determinism theory, as they sort of go from antiquity through the medieval world.

And so, environmental determinism right, it's geography, topography, climate, and how they impact physiology and character. And this theory first appears in that sort of really explicit form in the Hippocratic eras [unclear – 49:48] places in the 5th century. But it runs well through the early 20th century, I mean, Jared Diamond sort of is the contemporary carrier of that torch still today. But it is explicitly in a part of American race science, and sort of underscores a lot of American racism, but most people don't realize that. But it runs through medieval medicine, it runs through the Arab scholars, Jewish texts, Chinese texts from antiquity and the medieval world, and it's all over the ancient sources.

So, I decided I wanted to do this book back in, like, 2011, and I managed to get an editor at Routledge to think it was a good idea. So that came out in 2015, and it's quiet, you know, a lot of people don't know – because it doesn't have the title, it doesn't have the word 'race' in it, or 'ethnicity.' And so people don't realize until they open it up what it's actually about. And it hasn't sort of created the kind of backlash.

And so in some ways, I'm sad that I didn't just lay it out there, but on the other hand, would it have gotten picked up if I had talked about it in terms of race instead of in terms of identity? It's interesting work, but it's not traditional work, and so sending it through a traditional – trying to send the chapter that I wrote for that volume through a traditional journal peer review process would have resulted in epic fail, I think.

And I think one of the things you'll notice is that some people like Denise McCoskey and others who have published a lot earlier in the 90s on race in the field – it's not in our standard journals, typically. She was having to put it into... not Classics journals, whether they were more Modern Languages, Political Science, or Education… she often had to go outside the sort of mainstream Classics journals to get things published. So I've been strategic, a bit, about that, because there is a lot of gatekeeping that goes on and if you want to get this stuff out there – and then once it's out there, people start – if the book is there when you go decide, “I think I want to teach race and ethnicity,” and then you go and you find there's a sourcebook there, right? [laughs] It's like, it makes it a little easier for you. And that's why I started putting my syllabi online, and have other people who are gonna be sending me their syllabi, so I can build this database of syllabi that people can look at if they want to get started in doing it.

MARK: A key issue at the institutional level is that this sort of work – public-facing scholarship – tends not to be valued by those who decide on hiring, tenure, and promotion. This problem was highlighted repeatedly.

KATHERINE BLOUIN: Whenever you have a certain level of comfort that allows you to take a certain position or to say, “You know what, I'm gonna spend a bit more time this year on doing things that won't count for as many points in my performance report at the end of the year, but that might, for me, give me more points in terms of my sense of actually doing something meaningful with my knowledge,” then I think those of us who are in a position to take these decisions should do it.

And that's what I'm trying to do. Obviously this won't give you as much praise in your yearly performance bulletin, you know, that you write blog posts that you write blog posts that are not refereed, or that you will, I don't know, give a free public lecture at your local public library. But it might still have very tangible impact on your communities, and this is not something we should look down upon, as scholars. I think it is important to try to engage in more concrete conversations with people with them that feel a bit outside, to tear down this really imaginary wall.

That is also a sort of a wall that is used by people who want to undermine the use of academia in general, and of the humanities and social science in particular; we're being increasingly, again, portrayed as an elite who does just masturbatory work and doesn't really care about the masses or whatever it means. Well, I don't think this is the case, but perhaps we owe it to ourselves to make it even clearer – not so much in reaction to such stigmatizing rhetoric, but more in terms of actually building community and doing something with our knowledge that benefits – or making it accessible to more people.

REBECCA FUTO KENNEDY: As a field, if we want people to understand better what it is what we do, we have to make the materials accessible to them, and I think this came up actually with the conversation about the new translation of the *Odyssey*. This idea that, who translates things matters, but also, do you get credit for translating? You don't get credit for it.

DONNA ZUCKERBERG: Yes, it's very challenging because… especially for earlier career scholars, late-stage graduate students, post-docs, people on tenure track. I think that those kinds of scholars have a great potential to make an impact when writing for the public, but they also have the most at stake, in terms of the most to lose.

And increasingly I am hearing that an interest in public-facing work is viewed positively by research communities, but not too much of an interest. Because of it's too much of an interest, then you may not be sufficiently dedicated to your peer-reviewed work. Just enough, you know. The kind of interest where you might appear on a podcast, you know, or write for *Eidolon*. But not the kind of interest where you would produce it.

And I think that fixing that particular outlook will have to be part of a bigger solution as well. But I've been asked many times, “Where should I put this on my CV?” And I mean, what do I say? Service? Somewhere – usually I tell them at the very bottom of their publications. Books come first, and then edited volumes, and then peer-reviewed scholarship, blah blah blah, put it somewhere below the book reviews, you know?

ASA MITTMAN: And I think this is a great idea that I have not yet done, but I am tossing this out to you and to anybody else who might be listening. Every time we do a substantial project, every time we do a book or series of articles or even just a good, hefty article that has something to say to our own modern world, culture, politics, moment – and I would hope that pretty much everything we're doing does have something to say to our current moment – we should find a way to spin out of it a more public-facing short publication. We should find a way to try and publish brief pieces, op-eds, blog posts, something that would take the work that we're doing and writing for our twelve friends, and push it out to a larger, non-specialist audience.

And there have been some great examples of this. Send a piece to the New York Times about how – there's been some wonderful work recently on medievalism and white supremacy; I would note *The Public Medievalist* website is fantastic, doing exceptional public scholarship – public scholarship should be part of our portfolio from the start. And... those of us who are in positions of some authority within the field – so that's people who do hires, who oversee tenure and promotion applications, things like that – talking about people like me – should also consciously welcome and recognize that work from people entering the field and making their way up through the ranks, so that they realize that that will be recognized as valuable work when they're putting together their job applications and their tenure portfolios and so on.

REBECCA FUTO KENNEDY: I had already – because I'd already been in the field for so many years before I got this job, I actually had already published a monograph before I got here, and then I published a second one before I went up for tenure, but I also had done the sourcebook. And my provost, you know, in the conversation about my tenure, they're like, “Well of course, everyone was all over the immigrant women book and blah blah blah,” and they said, “It's wonderful...” You know, it was mixed about the sourcebook, on whether that's scholarship. And I was like, “You know what, you try reading a thousand years' worth of literature [laughs] to find the actual relevant sources to do this work, and tell me that's not scholarship.”

KATHERINE BLOUIN: You know, I've been thinking how can people believe all this crap about the classical roots of white supremacy, and all these claims they're making about a certain whiteness of the ancient world, and well, on the one hand most people do not have the degree – be it undergraduate or graduate in Classics or in Ancient History – so the most they've had is maybe one or two high school history classes where the ancient world is presented, and what they see in mainstream media and on Discovery Channel. And then if very few scholars actually spend the time to do this type of engagement in broader conversation, then who are we letting the ground to?

DONNA ZUCKERBERG: And then holding ourselves to a higher standard in our public-facing work, for articulating the value of our field. This particular part of my answer to the solution to the problem is the one that I get the most pushback for, you know, formally. But I believe that we can do better than, “This is the foundation of Western civilization.”

That is so often, I think, what we fall back on when trying to articulate our value, and to some extent, I mean, I'm sympathetic. The value of what we do is so often under fire, and it feels like an attractive answer. But hopefully the pitfalls of that answer are becoming more obvious.

And I'm hopeful that at least a few of the people who, when I initially wrote that last November, the people who lashed out – I'm hopeful that some of those people heard Trump's speech in Warsaw in – was it June or July? – where he was talking about Western civilization's gifts to the world, and thought, “Huh, there maybe really is something white supremacist about this.”

So many of the articles we publish at Eidolon are a little bit comparative between something in Ancient Greece or Rome and something in the present day, and it's really tempting to have the title or the sort of tagline for the article be something about “the ancient roots of Twitter,” or whatever. But we really, really try not to fall back on any kind of roots or foundation narrative because… I do think it's very limiting. It's much more interesting and productive, in my mind, to sort of put the two things next to each other and see what happens when you look at them alongside each other than to sort of have to look at it as that the ancient is at the foundation of everything.

AVEN: So, should scholars be trying to respond to incorrect and hateful uses and misuses of the past by people on the internet, in public, and elsewhere? And if so, how?

HELEN YOUNG: Okay, I think there's limited value in corrective responses to white extremist views of the Middle Ages. The reality is that the kind of social media interactions where somebody posts something ridiculously anachronistic and then we say, “No, no, that's wrong.”

On one level, you're never going to convince the person who has the extremist view, or it's very difficult and you're not likely to do it through a Twitter exchange. But I do think it's very valuable and very important to provide that counter-narrative. Because the people that you're speaking to on social media are never just the person that you're tweeting back to, you know? Your tweets are also being read, hopefully, by people who haven't already made up their mind. You're always speaking as well to the movable middle, to the people who, if they only ever see one version of the Middle Ages has – if people only ever see the white supremacist version of the Middle Ages, then they have no other idea. They can't challenge that idea, they don't even recognize that it can be challenged.

So I do think it's very important to publicly work against that view of the Middle Ages. I think it's important to do it in social media, to do it in regular media. I think it's important to do it in the classroom and to think about how your research might be able to challenge that view.

I think it's also important to not just be reactive, so to not wait until there's something terrible to argue against, but to sort of provide something that as much as one can to present Medieval Studies and the Middle Ages as a space that is not 'whites-only' in a proactive way. And I do think that speaking to those people and presenting them with a view that does counter what's still a dominant perspective on the Middle Ages is really important, and really potentially useful.

DONNA ZUCKERBERG: And I do think it helps when there are more classicist voices doing that in public, so we can't – I mean, what Mary Beard is doing is incredible, and I cannot believe the awful stuff that she's getting for it. But, you know, Mary Beard can't solve that for all of us.

So that's part of it – part of it is to have more voices speaking up and doing what she's doing, and working to combat those narratives. And then, there's that large – hopefully large – potentially convincible audience who we could reach who might be susceptible to alt-right Classics, but also might be interested to hear what professional classicists think that Ancient Rome and Greece, and Roman Britain looked like. And so, presenting our work in a way that is accessible and vital and relevant.

ASA MITTMAN: There's a strong tendency, a strong desire – and I am definitely guilty of this – to want to just rail about these things, scream about how awful they are and how terrifying they are. But we have to, I think, also speak in a way that doesn't demonize people sitting in the room with us. If we can manage it – I'm not, this is very hard for me, it's very troubling to think about, but if we can always perceive, to start from a place of compassion. I mean, that's *their* flaw, right, is failing to do that. If we can manage that.

And again, I'm not saying I live up to this goal all the time; I'm not saying it's easy or necessarily universally possible, but if we can start from a place of compassion, I think we have a much greater chance of reaching even the furthest out on the spectrum.

But you can see it in students' eyes, you know, as I walk around my classroom – I tend to be pretty jittery and mobile – and as I'm walking around even the big class, got a hundred people in the room, and talking about this issue and you can see it right in people's eyes, how much you need to talk about these things, how much they need to hear them, how appreciative often they are of the fact that this conversation is even happening in a place where they didn't anticipate it.

And on that, one point I would make is – we've got women and gender studies classes, we've got gender and sexuality classes, we've got African or Africana studies classes, we've got critical race studies classes in all of our universities, all this stuff's here; we've got Jewish studies classes, we've got classes on Islam, right? We have all these things, right? But the people who are in those classes aren't the ones who we most necessarily need to reach.

And so, what we need to be doing is deploying whatever it is we do to get these messages across. There's an enormous opportunity in teaching a general education class to 120 students. That class consists of engineers and biologists and business majors and kinesiologists and oh, two art historians in the front row.

And so, I've decided not to waste it. Everything that we've all three of us been talking about, about teaching also applies to research. So if we're going to write a book, let's say, let's just say for the sake of argument that someone were to write a book about, say, maps and monsters in Medieval England. At random, off the top of my head. Now that might be a book that does deal with issues of race, and actually gets it wrong a few places here and there. But let's say you wrote that whole book and never really engaged with whether or not there were women alive in the Middle Ages. That might be a severely missed opportunity, as well as a kind of conceptual flaw. For those not familiar, yeah, that was my first book, and it came out of my dissertation and, you know, I mean, I'm proud of it, and also there are things that are wrong.

But, so I think the same thing – of course, not every article and every book can be about literally every *thing*. The question should always be present as we're thinking about how we're framing our work: are we, without thinking about it, leaving out whole swathes of the human beings who were looking at, making, seeing, receiving, paying for all of this stuff? Are we not cognisant of that? Are we not thinking about the way that things like race or religion are constructed in the images that we're talking about?

I'm not saying every article that anybody writes now has to be about race and gender and sex and class and so on. But I'm saying, I really do think we need to think about it literally every time we write. We have to ask ourselves the question, “Is that somehow relevant? Am I leaving out a portion of this story by not considering it? Does it have a place in this? Can I work it in?”

And the answer shouldn't be, “I don't have room for it,” or, “Oh, it's not really what I do, I really work on something else,” or, “Oh, I'm not informed enough.” [chuckles] But all the people that we would be talking about, writing academic books, all have all of the skills necessary to learn how to talk about these things, right? So it's a question of, “Where do I want to dedicate my time?” and I would say we should be dedicating our time to this as a key thing.

USAMA ALI GAD: I remember that I have read a German article by a professor who was trying to defend the position of papyrology and say that it is important for the ancient history. And he was writing online, but for a very local and very specific audience saying that papyrology is very important for the ancient history of Europe. And, papyri is historical [unclear – 1:08:21] that is very important, either the documentary or the literature, the Greek literature is important for our ancient history.

So, I wrote to him and told him that if you are talking about the importance of papyrology online, you have to take into account that I could read you and I am an Egyptian, and I have studied in German, and I know German, and ancient history is our history. It's the history of humanity, not just the history of Europeans, or Muslims, or Arabs. It's – ancient history is the history of all humanities. There is connections there, so don't say that it's exclusively European. It is our ancient history as well as others' ancient history.

That the world, it is now a small village, and I think the idea has been there even in antiquity – during the Roman Empire the idea that all world is just one polis; it's just one city, a government by the Roman Empire. Now we are becoming more and more one small village.

MARK: So, even though the Internet can feel like the cause of the problem sometimes, it also provides many of the possible solutions: a source of community, a vector of information, a platform for sources that truly do make our disciplines more accessible.

USAMA ALI GAD: I think that is now – we do have a lot of advancement in this regard, especially it was the advancement of digital culture. Speaking from experience, I have to say that my colleagues – whenever there is a project and I told them that there are students in Egypt who are studying Greek and Latin history, or Greek and Latin literature, or reading it in Arabic, and please try to localize your website, or localize this or that, they tell me that, okay, go ahead, please give us what you want, and they uploaded it.

In this regard, for example, there is the project of [speaks German – 1:10:44-5], which is a technical dictionary of the technical terms in Greek papyri, which is on Leipzig, for example – and in the print culture, in its printed version, you will have it in German. But now, it is... thanks to the digital shift, we do have this dictionary online with translation of the [limita? – 1:11:10] into German, French, Italian, Spanish, and of course English, as well as in Arabic. I am responsible of the Arabic translation of the [limita? – 1:11:20] which is something that I think will facilitate the study of all the students in Egypt.

In papyri, and also I have been incorporating with the [unclear – 1:11:33] in order to have some Arabic translations of the Greek papyri there. And so on. I think this project is important in this regard, the digital aspect – when you go digital, you should be thinking of a global audience, not just in Europe, or America or Australia, you will be seen here also in the Arabic world, so... try to localize it, try to have an interface in Arabic.

The people are eager, the youth are eager to learn about their history. I think the 25th of January Revolution in Egypt has shown to the world that there are a lot of youth who are using the Internet and using it effectively to know about their past, and their present, and to speculate about the future. And as an Egyptian who is living in Egypt, I can say that this is still the same. They still face the same problem, they still face the same challenges, and they are searching the internet for a solution, they are trying to go away from this ideological view of the state, or about the past, you know; the narrative, the governmental narrative about the past. They are trying to find their own way.

And I think the digital culture in this regard could do something, if you broadcast us by blogging about it in English or in Arabic, you know, that will be great. So the direction should be in this, that there is audience in this version who is eager to know, and we should address this audience. Not just the audience where we publish or do our work.

And I was just in a conference in Trier which is called Modern Arabic Scholarship on the Medieval and Ancient World, and it's actually a good initiative because we will build a database of all the bibliography, the modern Arabic bibliography in the ancient world; in papyrology, in archaeology, in literature. In Arabic, with transliteration into English. And this database will be updated regularly, and I will write a reference work about the Classical Studies in the Arab world. So I think this is something that will give a chance to anyone who is eager to know about this, to read it; it will be in English.

And I think this is progress, you know, to recognize Arabic, to recognize the living tradition of modern Arabic scholarship in Classics. As many people all over the world recognize the classical Arabic tradition – I mean the Greek translation movement under the Abassid, you will have a lot of scholarship in this. But, for the living tradition in Classics, you will have almost none. Just a few small articles about what is happening here in Egypt, but no comprehensive study of this. And the living tradition is entirely neglected. The people are producing articles and scholarship, and actually, this is very important scholarship, because the Arabic audience are, as we have seen, responsible for living around archaeological sites, very important archaeological sites. If these people don't appreciate these archaeological sites, we would be seeing something like what we have seen in the last years you know, like destruction of these archaeological sites, or anything like this, because they don't believe that these things belong to us, you know?

To see these things as belongs to other people, I think, it's very dangerous, and so – because it does not belong to us, so we will destroy it or neglect it. Not our heritage, but actually it is' it is our heritage here. It's not a view that's shared by a lot of people here in Egypt and the Arabic world, but at least this is my view. And Greek and Latin, Egyptian, any other culture that has been here in Egypt is our heritage, is our past, you know.

So why not? Why not have a scholarship, an Arabic scholarship, and actually Arabic is important in this regard, because those people read mostly Arabic. To produce the scholarship in just German, English, French, and Italian will not be accessible to these people. And I think the print culture is – these are the most venerated languages of Classical Studies, as I noted in my studies you know. So either in English, German, French, Italian, but very few scholarships in Arabic.

I have started this blog which is *Classics in Arabic*, and I try to aggregate the news about Classical scholarship, and Arabic readership in Classics, you know, in English. And I have discovered, day after the other, that we have started a translation movement of the literature, of the Greek and Latin literature, beginning from the 19th century. And we have actually translated most of the Greek drama, the main three dramatists, Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides into Arabic. So, why is this – and it has been performed in the National Theatre of Egypt, and it has been viewed, and it has been broadcast on the radio, and most of the people know about it. So why it is exclusively European?

So, I began to go on further and dig deeper and deeper, began to realize that this has not to do with the view of the Arabs themselves to this heritage, but has to do with the modern history of the version, the modern history in which we are living now. This view that has been imposed in Egypt in its modern history. You could go to Donald Reid's book about *Whose Pharaohs*, and you will see how [name unclear – 1:18:31] has used the Classics, has used the Greek and Roman past for his ideological purposes, in order to control these people and to subjugate these people.

AVEN: Our interviewees had a variety of suggestions and stories about their own experiences that may help point our way forward through these difficult issues.

DAMIAN FLEMING: I've found that one of the – if not solutions, but things that we need to be doing, is just – where opportunities present themselves, or I think opportunities are all over the place if you are aware of it... Just introduce this, allow your students to see that like, yes, this old material can be problematic in these ways, and we should talk about it. Just cause it's old doesn't mean it's allowed to do X or Y, or make these various assertions. We can object to it.

The other issue related to this is, if we are going to talk about these things, we need to be careful and aware of what we're doing, of the types of material we're throwing out there. I hope that we are all sensitive to our students' own experiences, what they might bring to the texts, but especially if we're gonna want to address issues like racism and sexual violence, that we do so thoughtfully and carefully.

DIMITRI NAKASSIS: I taught a class at Toronto about trying to introduce our students to research. So, you know, teaching them how to write a research paper, that sort of – Method and Theory is, I think, the name of the class, developed by a friend of mine, Ben Akrigg. And for all of our undergraduate majors, to sort of help them once they got to these upper-level seminars to realize, you know, you're not in a lecture anymore, you have to write a research paper.

Yeah, and so one of the things I was trying to tell them about in that class was the kinds of research that classicists do, that we don't just sit around reading – you know, some of us may do this, but most of us don't just sit around reading Livy and Thucydides all day, we're engaged in other kinds of research endeavours, that the field is really active and dynamic. And one of the things I talked about was the Archimedes Palimpsest. Because of the idea of the whole thing by like, how do we have our texts, where do we get our texts from, we've got manuscripts, we've got papyri, we've got these palimpsestic texts.

You know, it's an interesting example, because there's a Byzantine prayer book [sighs] written in Jerusalem making use of older texts that include a manuscript of Archimedes. It's then purchased by some wealthy patron – maybe Jeff Bezos, I think is the rumour – and then gifted to the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore, which then takes apart the Byzantine prayer book so that they can subject it to all of these different scientific tests so that they can read the text of Archimedes underneath.

And it's a great example of scientific analysis helping us to discover new texts, and the students love it for that reason, but there's also an ethical question, which is that: Is it really ethical? You know, the Orthodox Church of Jerusalem tried to block the sale, and a judge in New York said, “No, no, no, the sale is legal, it can go forward.”

But you know, I was telling my students, “I hope that if you found a Byzantine prayer book, the first thing you wouldn't do is rip it apart, you know, [laughs] To find some ancient text underneath. Not to say that the Walters was doing something unethical, but, the Byzantine prayer book has value in its own right, right? It's its own [laughs] sort of cultural artifact.

Yeah, and you think about the fact that there used to be a Greek village on top of ancient Delphi that was moved, or the way that there are inscriptions built into modern Greek churches. You know, what do you do? Do you rip those churches apart so you can find the super-valuable inscriptions? Well, I think most of would say, “No, you don't do that,” right? But there was a time when people were much more willing to do just that. What's the value of an 18th-century church compared to the inscriptions we might find?

So, that's one way that something gets prioritized.

It's funny, you know, for all of us, so much of our world is really like a post-world war II phenomenon. And it's so easy to take it for granted. When I talk to other Greek-Americans or Greek-Canadians about the way Greeks were received in North America a hundred years ago, some of them find it really hard to believe. And it is hard to believe, right? Because, like, [sighs] I remember as a kid – yeah, I was in high school, we watched this video about racism – I think it was Bill Cosby actually – and Bill Cosby turns into, like, a bigot against all these different groups. And at one point he starts making fun of Greeks. And everyone laughed, you know? Because it was kind of ridiculous, you know, no one ever said to me, “Oh, you know, you're a damn Greek,” or something like that.

But that wasn't the case for Greeks that came to Canada or the US not too long ago, so it's really hard, I think, for people to – for all of us to realize the sort of, the way in which the world we live in now is really young, it's really new, it's really different from the world that our grandparents were born into.

HELEN YOUNG: I think disciplinary silos have something to do with the sort of failures of Medieval Studies to do better, in that many, many people who work in the field have never encountered any of the theory that might have led them to think differently, or to look at their discipline differently.

You know, my PhD was in post-colonial theory in Middle English romance, and the only reason that happened is that I went a university – for undergraduate, I went to the University of Wollengong, which really taught very little Medieval Studies; there was one Chaucer course and then about halfway through my degree, Louise D'Arcens came there and started teaching Medieval Studies and Medievalism.

But so all my undergraduate training was in post-colonial literature, and then when I encountered these medieval texts, I started sort of seeing similar kinds of things in the literature. But then when I came to my PhD, I had this... not highly-developed, but I had a body of post-colonial theory that was informing my thinking and always has. Whereas for many people who study Medieval Studies right through an undergraduate degree, certainly in the late 90s, would never have encountered that sort of theory, or would have only done so in passing. And I think there's certainly a lot of PhD programs and undergraduate programs that are changing that now, but it takes time [laughs] for the discipline to change.

DAMIAN FLEMING: And again, the case of *Beowulf* which, maybe I know better than a lot of medieval texts, we don't have a lot to go on when it comes to studying *Beowulf*, we have this one copy of the text, there are no variant versions of it, and there's no explicit sources that we can say unambiguously, “This is what the *Beowulf* poet was manipulating to create this text.”

But at the same time, since the beginning of *Beowulf* scholarship, scholars have kind of 'picked and choosed' which elements of the poem as we have it are considered the elements worth celebrating. It's always the parody version that most of my students, if they come into my class having studied *Beowulf* at all like in high school, is like, “This is a great epic pre-Christian poem that has been messed up after the fact by some Christian.” So if you ignore all the Christian parts of this poem, you will find a good, Germanic poem.

And I mean, I don't know if I'm successful, no matter how much I stress that we cannot make this argument, this is a very problematic argument to make based on the evidence, because we only have one version of this poem and it is imbued with these Christian elements. But yeah, that's kind of what fantasy writers or even scholars do when they kind of pick and choose what elements of the poem they think are the 'true poem.' And one of the things that people concentrate on is the, “Well, you know, it's a manly poem in some way, this is a poem about men doing deeds.” And in doing that, they then erase half of the characters in the poem.

Right now, I am teaching Old English and I'm focusing a lot on *Beowulf* and the *Beowulf* manuscript in a way that I'd never done before for a semester-long Old English class. And at the same time, I'm rereading *The Hobbit* with my daughter, and now we've started *Lord of the Rings* with my daughter. So, I'm thinking about kind of medievalism and fantasy and *Beowulf* and the other texts contained with *Beowulf* more deeply than I have maybe ever before.

And then the background is this current political situation. So even apart from the racial issue, I've been thinking about the lack of gender diversity in Tolkien's works. And especially *The Hobbit*, and I never even saw all *The Hobbit* movies, I saw the first one and I was kind of so disappointed I never saw anymore [laughs] but the notion they had to maybe create maybe one or more female characters. And then the implied argument against it, like, “Well, you know, this is coming from a time period when women, whatever, were not involved in these types of things, in adventures to find gold or whatever, therefore it makes sense that Tolkien chose to have an all-male cast of characters.”

But that again is an absurd argument, because on the one hand, as people who study the Middle Ages or Classical times, we have all kinds of both female writers and female characters showing up in our literature. And for a text like *Hobbit* and *Lord of the Rings*, reading it alongside *Beowulf*, *Beowulf* the poem – which Tolkien knew inside and out – has six or eight? a number of named female characters – who, when I read it with my students, I struck every single time how central their perception of the events in the poem of *Beowulf* are.

This is how I read *Beowulf*, and it means a lot more, I find, to my students than… a lot of students come into it thinking it's gonna be this warrior-smashing, kind of stereotypical masculine kind of way. When the poem is actually, like, fundamentally sad in a lot of ways, and it's the sadness is highlighted by these female characters. But Tolkien, we he read *Beowulf*, he read it through different lenses, and he read it in the early 20th century, and the fantasy world he created out of *Beowulf*, is very different from the fantasy world, say, *I* may have created out of *Beowulf*. But there's nothing inherent in reading *Beowulf* that necessarily would imply the type of fantasy world that Tolkien created. So if you say, you're going to make fantasy literature in 2017, and you're gonna have a wealth of diversity, like sexual diversity and racial diversity and all kinds of diversity, and if someone says, “Well, you're really reflecting your own 2017 cultures and beliefs,” I think the answer to that is, “Yeah, and what's the problem with that?” Because that's exactly what Tolkien was doing, and that's what various – you know, when medieval people retell medieval stories, you know, their stories are a mix of older material, but it's clearly being shaped by the worldviews and the preconceptions of the teller of the story.

ASA MITTMAN: These other concerns need to be integrated into what we're doing from the ground up, as a baseline feature of our teaching. So, I'm teaching this semester – I'm the chair of the department now, so I'm only teaching one class one semester while I'm doing that, so I'm teaching this big intro survey, and while in some of my upper-division courses, all these themes have already been pretty prevalent, and I teach – next semester I'm teaching my course on the history of monstrosity, and this is what it's all about, you know, one way or another.

But in my intro survey it never really was. I kind of left that, “Oh we'll get to that,” – the sort of old model is, you teach them the lovely story of Columbus in third grade, and then they get to college and you say, “Okay, and also genocide.” So why are we giving them this sort of bogus narrative to start and then correcting it later?

And the same is true I would say with our – I have 120 students in my intro class. I will have 20 in my medieval class. I will have 20 in my monster class. So most of those students will not go on and get that. So, all right, what do I cover in that class now? 40,000 years of art, you know, that starts with the Woman from Willendorf. And you know what, Woman from Willendorf is a great place to start the discussion of racism because all the textbooks still call her the Venus of Willendorf, a name that she picked up because the French guy who was there when they found her was obsessed with Saartjie Baartman, the so called 'Venus Hottentot' who was a San woman who was paraded around Europe in freak shows, and named Venus in that kind of ironic, mocking way, the way that you call a giant guy 'Tiny.' And so, when she was termed 'Venus,' it was a way of highlighting the way that she was considered to be hideous by the racist societies through which she was transported.

And so when this guy, [name unclear – 1:31:43] looked at the woman from Willendorf, he thought she looked like Saartjie Baartman, and named her after her. And so she's not named as the textbooks falsely claim – because she does seem to be some kind of fertility goddess or fertility idol of some kind, that she therefore is being associated with Venus, the god of sexuality and love and all of that – that's not who she's named after. She's named after this woman who was paraded in freak shows.

And I should note it's a complicated story, she had some agency; an organization sued for her kind of release from her manager, and she took the stand and said, “I'm making good money, leave me alone, I don't want to be quote-unquote 'released,'” you know, her story is complex and fascinating. But when she died, this guy [name unclear – 1:32:26], attempted to buy her preserved genitals. Okay, *that's* the guy who named her so-called 'Venus of Willendorf.' Is that a guy we want to let name our works? Do we want to pass on his viewpoints tacitly by using these terms? And so, that's where I start the class now.

So what's the cost? All right, this semester – that I've used for a couple of years 'cause I, when I read a book about this I found it fascinating and horrifying. But this semester I've been working really hard to integrate this material straight throughout the course at every stage in each unit that we're dealing with, and there's a trade-off, right? Because the great – I'm sure you and everybody who has ever taught any subject knows that the great challenge in teaching is the debate between depth and coverage, right? 40,000 years of history, I'm covering, you know, in theory it used to be considered sort of European history, but really it's the entire Mediterranean basin, it's North African stuff, Middle Eastern stuff, as well as European stuff – that is a gargantuan amount of material to cruise through. And so anything that I say in that class that is not information, historical context, visual analysis about works of art from exactly those traditions that are in there – all of that material is actually taking time away from the other stuff. And that I think, is again where some of that pushback you were referring to comes from.

That said, again, gotta ask ourselves: What's the important thing here? What are we really doing? What's the point? What are we trying to accomplish? The vast majority of students taking that class are not going to come away from it expert in the intricacies of Etruscan art. That can't be its purpose, because if they don't follow up on it, if it is the first *and* last class they're going to take in this subject, that data is not going to be the thing that is cemented in them so that 20 years from now, they find themselves saying, “Well, of course the Romans made extensive use of the bronze-casting abilities of the Etruscans once they conquered them.” Like, that's not gonna happen. So… if that's the function of the class, it's just not going to succeed long-term.

So instead, if part of the function of this class can be revealing to students some of the problematic history that is both – and by that I mean both the history of the periods we're discussing and the historiography of the subjects we're teaching – that is so much more valuable, I think, than making sure that I get to the last image in each of my PowerPoints. Consequently I'm not getting to any of the last images in my PowerPoints this semester. [laughs] And I feel a little bit badly about that. On the other hand, we are having really rich and I think meaningful discussions and I've had students come up to me after class, come to my office hours, to express that it means a lot to them to hear these discussions, to have these conversations in these contexts.

REBECCA FUTO KENNEDY: Johns Hopkins asked me to write a book on this based on my *Eidolon* material. It's a frightening moment, but I think it's an important moment for us, that this issue of race and ethnicity as it's represented in the ancient world versus how white our field is… [laughs] Why that there might be some connection between that, and even just thinking about liberal arts education itself and how that contributes to the whiteness of higher ed, generally speaking.

I mean, I was very fortunate. When I was an adjunct and visitor at George Washington University for three years and I worked with Eric Cline there, Biblical archaeologist. He's huge on public outreach, like, he does stuff with National Geographic, he's gotten more outreach awards in the area than anybody. And he always said, you know, especially in the area of Biblical archaeology, “When you cede that territory to cranks and non-specialists you set yourself up within the academy to fail. You set the field up to diminish expertise, to diminish the work that we do.” And I think that's the problem. That diminishment of public scholarship is sort of rampant. Then we shouldn't be surprised when white supremacists are running around carrying shields [laughs] with Spartan emblems on them. Because we're letting non-experts and video game makers and other people just dictate and decide what the ancient world looks like to the public.

ASA MITTMAN: If we say that the Middle Ages, this period that I'm going to stand up here and praise a whole lot for the brilliant manuscripts and works of architecture and so on that they were making, has been used powerfully by white supremacists to advance their hate-filled agenda – it matters to the students from all backgrounds and perspectives, the people who will hear their own fears and concerns and the dangers that really do exist in their worlds, recognized, heard, seen by the bald guy with a beard and a PhD who stands at the front of the classroom and looks like Mr. Professor Guy, you know?

That matters enormously, I think, to them, and I think it also, though, matters… I mean, if we have – and I hope we don't, but if we have an out-and-out, fervent Nazi in the room, I doubt that I have any opportunity to change how they feel about it, but most people are not at one end of a spectrum or another, right, most people are somewhere in the middle, and if we have students who just really might never have thought about it that way, and might never have given a whole lot of credence to maybe a little thing they read online here or there, and might never have put it together in the big picture or might not have seen how it might matter to them, to their classmates, to their friends, to their family, to the people around, to our society at large… if we don't take advantage of the fact that we are actually, literally the people with a microphone [laughs] standing on a platform in front of a room… God, we're wasting our time.

USAMA ALI GAD: As you can see, we do have this, the rise of ultra-right, and all these things, and also here in the Middle East or in the Arab world we have this, what we have been calling as [failed states? –1:38:32], so these are challenges. We have to look at what we as intellectuals, what we as scholars are producing. Are we producing something to radicalize our society? Are we producing something to make our societies more self-centric? Or we are producing something that says that we are all human family? And look at here, look at there, multiculturalism is the norm, not exception. And pluralism is the norm, not exception of the history of humankind, but what we are seeing, what we are doing, that's… that's very important, I think.

MARK: Even with these two long episodes, it feels like we’ve only scratched the surface of these topics. We would love to keep the conversation going – in other podcasts, like *The Mirror of Antiquity*, and the *Itinera* podcast, which are both interviewing classicists about many topics, and which have both touched on related issues – or on Twitter at @AllEndlessKnot, or the Endless Knot Facebook page, or at alliterative.net/podcast, in the comments. Let us know what you thought about the things our guests had to say, and what ideas or suggestions or anecdotes you have to contribute.

AVEN: Thank you again to everyone who spoke to us: Katherine Blouin, Damian Fleming, Usama Ali Gad, Rebecca Futo Kennedy, Asa Mittman, Dimitri Nakassis, Helen Young, and Donna Zuckerberg.

More information about all of them are in the shownotes, but in particular we’d recommend you check out these blogs: *Everyday Orientalism*, to which both Katherine and Usama contribute; *Classics at the Intersections*, by Rebecca Futo Kennedy; *Aegean Prehistory*, by Dimitri; *Classics in Arabic*, by Usama; and the online journal *Eidolon*, edited by Donna. Also look for Helen’s book *Race and Popular Fantasy Literature: Habits of Whiteness*, and Asa’s several books on medieval monsters, including *Inconceivable Beasts: The Wonders of the East in the Beowulf Manuscript*.

Also, all of them (except Asa) can be found on Twitter – info in the shownotes. We especially recommend following Damian at @FW\_Medieval for a wide range of delightful medieval manuscripts, and history of English and more.

MARK: And finally, we’ll be putting a number of links in the shownotes to further reading on these topics. In particular, the website *The Public Medievalist* has been running an amazing series on Race, Racism, and the Middle Ages, which we highly recommend.

We'll be back in two weeks with an episode that returns to etymology with an exploration of the origins of the Mai Tai, and discussions of cultural interactions from the ancient world to today. Thanks for listening!

AVEN: Bye!

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MARK: Bye!