

Often when thinking about race and racism, especially in America, we think about slavery which of course has played a part. However, slavery in America is far after the beginning of racism in the world. The question of race does not always have slavery involved, in fact it is often easy to forget the times when white people were in the slave trade in Europe. However the ideas behind racism have been around for a very long time, lots of it stemming from the study of ancient times, like Greece and Rome. One of the reasons that ancient times have influenced our ideas of race so much is because of how much respect people have for these ancient civilizations.

Because of how advanced they were for their time, and the huge effect they had in other cultures, places like ancient Greece are put on a pedestal and considered to be classical and extremely refined. While of course ancient civilizations are amazing, and they advanced so much, it is very wrong to assume that they were perfect, and the peak of humanity.

Johann Winckelmann is often thought of today as the father of art history and during his time was widely recognized for his studies in ancient art and the cultures surrounding it.

Winckelmann greatly idealized ancient Greek culture, believing that humanity should strive to be more like them, claiming that by their artistic depictions, they had the ideal form and color for a human being. More specifically, the *Apollo Belvedere*, a beautiful statue depicting the Greek god Apollo, being shown as a flawless young man captured in pearly white marble. Winckelmann says that this is the ideal form and color, being pearly white. However, during Winckelmann's time, he had to spend most of his time in Rome where he could only study the copies of ancient Greek art that had been made there. These copies and their perfect white marble were quite different from actual Greek statues, whose marble had a much darker and patina look. By looking at the copies of Greek art, actually made in Rome, Winckelmann wrongly assumed that the Greeks were too sophisticated to color their work. Because of Winckelmann's popularity,

once the ancient classical times became more widely studied and more of ancient Greek art was being copied, artists adopted the perfect white look that Winckelmann idealized. While this might seem like a very simple mistake that should not change much, this has greatly changed our perception of ancient Greece today. When we think of Greek art we think of these pearly white statues, and greatly due to Winckelmann and others' deep idealization of them, we too think of the Greek god as an emblem of perfection. While of course we can now look back on these statues and just think about their beauty as art, due to Winckelmann's circulation of these ideas during his time, the idea of white being the ideal color for humans was deeply rooted in peoples heads. His work also inspired many others to study this idea of the perfect form and color for humans, only deepening his ideas further.

Petrus Camper, who was a well regarded illustrator and artist with a good academic background, came up with the idea of facial angles showing the differences between races. The facial angle he uses comes from different lines going across prominent features of the faces. Camper used images of orangutan, African, Mongolian European, and the *Apollo Belvedere* faces lined up next to each other, giving each a numeric value for the facial angle. Camper's intent though his work was to show how similar all of humanity actually is, and numerically was able to show his point, the African and Mongolian facial angles were closer to European than to the orangutan, and closer to the European than that of a Greek god. Camper stayed true to his initial intent, stating that his chart shows exactly how similar all of humanity really is, however this was not the reception that his work got in reality. Instead of focusing on the numbers as Camper did, others focused on the layout of his chart, with African and orangutans faces next to each other and European and the *Apollo Belvedere*. Again, the *Apollo Belvedere* is being used to show the ideal form of a human, and while it might not have been Camper's intention, certainly people

saw Apollo's whiteness and perfect form as the ideal. Seeing this layout, many ignored Camper's message and used this to show proof of white supremacy, specifically leaders in America while slave trade was still prominent. However, in Europe eventually Camper's chart was discredited and he lost his academic standing due to his simple approach, yet still more damage had been done contributing to the stigma of white people being closer to the ideal human form.

Another interesting work of art that had influence on our perception of race today, is the *Greek Slave*, a statue of a beautiful white enslaved woman, made by Hiram Powers. At the time, this piece of art became hugely popular, touring around the United States at a time where slavery was a very interesting topic, and also a widely uncomfortable and ignored topic. The choice of Powers to create this artwork of an enslaved white woman is very interesting, clearly the intent was to show the beauty of the woman even as a slave, but why the choice to make her white during a time of black slavery in America. At this time, it was very hard to find artwork done of beautiful black women anywhere, not just as slaves. Again this speaks to the stigma of the white aesthetic, popularized by many different people, making people believe that white people are the only able to capture this beauty. During such a controversial time for the topic of slavery, it is surprising how popular this particular sculpture was, even finding good reception in the south. One would think a statue like this would strike a cord for slave owners, confronting what they are doing to people, however this aspect of the artwork was mostly ignored, or really avoided by those slave owners in the United States.

While there are so many different things that contribute to our perception of race today, it is amazing how much effect, even just these very small things, that ancient civilizations and the study of it has contributed to our culture today surrounding race. It is hard to track exactly how much all of these things had by themselves, however the constant reminder of the perfection of

Greek culture of people over such a long time, firmly cemented the ideas of white supremacy in peoples heads at the time. These ideas are not yet gone today, still people compare themselves to Greek gods, still chasing the idealized artwork from ancient times.