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### “Justified” Racism in Antiquity

The emergence of the notion of racism that we understand in today’s political climate can arguably be correlated back to the enlightenment period, yet, in order to fully understand it’s history, it is crucial to investigate the conceptualizations of race and ethnicity in antiquity. Jackie Murray, a classics scholar, offers that “race emerges out of the desire or need of dominant groups to oppress or conquer other groups and this impetus leads to them to create categories of group-based sameness and otherness”. This idea leverages the ancient environmental theory, which proposes that human variation, including physical and cultural differences, is a result of geographic location and climate. Literature works such as *Hippocratic Corpus* along with works from authors such as Aristotle, and Pliny the elder uses this theory to form racist ideologies of otherness through climate and justify prejudice beliefs of inferiority.

The *Hippocratic Corpus, On Airs, Waters, Places* uses geography to form stereotypes of non-Greeks to make them seem scientifically inferior, while simultaneously praising the biological nature of Europeans. The work particularly examines Asia and how its temperate climate greatly impacts the character of its peoples. It states that Asians portray “faint-heartedness and cowardice” and that they “are less warlike than the peoples of our part of the world” (KRG 3.1). This is apparently due to the lack of shifts in climate, whereas people of origins who experience both hot and cold, like Europe, are braver. This racist distinction is again incessantly repeated when it states, “This is why I think those living in Europe are more

courageous than those in Asia. Laziness is a product of uniform climate. Endurance of both the body and soul come from change, also, cowardice increases softness and laziness, while courage engender endurance and a work ethic. For this reason, those dwelling in Europe are more effective fighters” (KRG 3.1). This work is an example of racism emerging through the use of geography as a tool to create harmful and stereotypical categories of otherness as a means to justify oppression of others such as Asians.

Aristotle, despite being admired for his philosophy, is also an enabler to racist ideologies based on climate. In his work, he not only creates a false narrative of Asians, but also Europeans in order to boost Greek people. Apparently, the inspiration behind *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* came from his work, as he describes Europeans brave but dense, due to their cold climates, and Asians as skilled but cowardly, yet the Greeks due to their midway location between the two are just right. Aristotle states, “The races of Greeks are geographically in between Asia and Europe. They also are “in between” character-wise”, sharing attributes of both – they are intelligent and courageous. The result is a continually free people, the best political system, and the ability to rule over others” (KRG 3.5). Aristotle is not only creating a sense of otherness between different cultures but using otherness to justify ethnocentrism and expansionism. Pliny the Elder also focuses on the idea of Greece’s central location to be the cause of their biological superiority. In his work, *Natural Histories*, he states, “but in the middle of the world there is a healthy mixture of hot and cold. The Lands are fertilized for all things, and the people’s bodies appear moderate in size and color because of this proper mixture. We find gentle customs, clear thoughts, and temperaments open and capable of understanding all of nature” (KRG 3.11). Climate is again being used by dominant groups as a reason for the racist idea of Greeks being superior by character. Others who do not uphold the same standards are deemed inferior.

Although the concept of race was not fully defined until the twentieth century, harmful stereotypes and prejudices have been created and used since antiquity. Oppression that was imposed by Greeks on others was determined to be justified by ancient Greek scholars through the attribution of cultural and biological characteristics to geography and climate. Of course, the Greek characteristics were thought superior to the characteristics of the other. Through analyzing race and ethnicity with both Murray's definition of race and ancient environmental theory in mind, scholars can identify the emergence of racism in antiquity, and thereby support the effort to dismantle the harmful narratives that were created.