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REFERENCES TO ANTIQUITY WITHIN PUBLIC DISCUSSION IN US  
NEWSPAPERS AT THE TURN OF THE 20TH CENTURY

Dissertation Summary

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### **Relevance of the topic**

Numerous activists and politicians, not only in the United States but across the Western world, are presently engaged in efforts to reevaluate the traditional cultural identity, the principles associated with systematic oppression of minorities and therefore tied with racism, sexism, and homophobia. Consequently, classical studies, which has long served as a marker for the white upper-class male, is reevaluate too. Contentious debates over the legitimacy of teaching Aristotle's philosophy, whose elitist views that justify the existence of slavery, are being criticized today in American academic institutions.<sup>1</sup> Discussions surrounding these topics arouse renewed interest in the legacy of antiquity, but, more significantly, in the implications it carries for the evolution of American society and the broader Western civilization.

Contemporary scholars exploring the reception of antiquity and the references to the ancient history within the sociopolitical discourses in the USA often used Congressional records,<sup>2</sup> historical treatises,<sup>3</sup> political pamphlets,<sup>4</sup> and university syllabi.<sup>5</sup> However, these sources predominantly reflect the perspectives

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<sup>1</sup> "Should We Cancel Aristotle?", *The New York Times*, July 21, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/21/opinion/should-we-cancel-aristotle.html>; "Why Are We Even Contemplating Canceling Aristotle?", *National Review*, July 22, 2020, <https://www.nationalreview.com/corner/why-are-we-even-contemplating-canceling-aristotle/>.

<sup>2</sup> Michel Meckler, "The Rise of Populism, the Decline of Classical Education, and the Seventeenth Amendment," in *Classical Antiquity and the Politics of America: From George Washington to George W. Bush*, ed. Michel Meckler (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2006), 68-82.

<sup>3</sup> Kristofer Allfeldt, "Rome, Race, and the Republic: Progressive America and the Fall of the Roman Empire, 1890-1920," *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 7, no. 3 (2008): 297-323. Kristofer Allfeldt, "Two Wars, Rome and America," *Comparative Civilizations Review* 60, no. 60 (2009): 99-119.

<sup>4</sup> Margaret Malamud, *Ancient Rome and Modern America* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 98-121.

<sup>5</sup> Caroline Winterer, *The Culture of Classicism: Ancient Greece and Rome in American Intellectual Life 1780-1910* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002).

of society's elite, leaving lacunae about the information about antiquity available to the average American. Regrettably, researches that focus on the press – such as Sarah Butler's work about the image of the Gracchi brothers in British newspapers<sup>6</sup> remain exceptions.

An appeal to American newspapers provides a unique opportunity to discern the nature of antiquity-related information disseminated amongst the American populace. However, that the characteristics of these newspapers (political preferences, geographic location, circulation, and editorial principles) inevitably determined the selection of narratives from ancient history and their representation. Consequently, different social groups cultivated distinct perceptions of Ancient Greece and Rome. Nevertheless, this variety of views remains underexplored in historiography. Existing studies tend to focus on specific narratives, thus providing insufficient grounds for substantial generalizations.

Based on an expansive corpus of various American newspapers, this dissertation concentrates on the wide range socio-political issues used references to the ancient history within American journalistic discourse. The research pays particular emphasis to the characteristic conceptions of the ancient Greek and Roman epochs, contingent on the nature of the publication and its unique traits. This endeavor not only serves to plug the historiographical lacuna, but also to contribute to the comprehension of how the representations of antiquity can be used and reconceptualized within contemporary public discourse.

## **Literature review**

The influence of ancient historical examples on American political rhetoric has never been in doubt; however, it is surprising that this subject was only recently recognized as a research problem. In his 1994 publication, Carl Richard expressed astonishment that his treatise exploring the Founding Fathers' reception

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<sup>6</sup> Stephen Butler, "Heroes or Villains: The Gracchi, Reform and the Nineteenth-Century Press," in *Classics in the Modern World: A Democratic Turn*, ed. Lorna Hardwick and Stephen Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 301-318.

of classical Greco-Roman texts was a pioneering work entirely dedicated to that topic.<sup>7</sup>

Efforts to comprehend the significance of antiquity's historical experience in a broader sense, as well as to evaluate its influence on social relations, were undertaken towards the end of the 20th century. This interest was largely stimulated by a conservative reaction to transformations in the American educational system and, consequently, a reduction in the role of the classical corpus of texts within it. In 1984, Meyer Reynold's publication "Classica Americana: Greek and Roman Heritage in the United States"<sup>8</sup> emerged, in which he endeavored to remind Americans about the nearly forgotten legacy of antiquity that significantly influenced to their ancestors.

The co-option of classical disciplines by conservative scholars inevitably elicited reactions from their ideological counterparts. For instance, in the preface to the anthology "Feminist Theory and Classics",<sup>9</sup> published in 1993 as part of the "Thinking Gender" series, a Nancy Rabinowitz asserted that classical languages and the history of Greco-Roman civilization remained markers of white, privileged man, thereby becoming a fountainhead of elitism.<sup>10</sup> However, the contributors to this volume were not intent on dismissing the entire ancient legacy on this basis. Their main objective was to democratize an exclusive discipline, by redefining the focus of study – the interest of historians needed to be shifted towards the status and role of minorities in ancient society. Nevertheless, such works tend to shed more light on current trends whether on the role of the classical heritage in America. Moreover, these works seem to be primarily driven by the need to construct a historiographical succession, in order to proof that the concern with issues of racism and sexism in antiquity is not merely a transient historiographical

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<sup>7</sup> Carl J. Richard, *The Founders and the Classics: Greece, Rome, and the American Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 1.

<sup>8</sup> Meyer Reinhold, *Classica Americana: The Greek and Roman Heritage in the United States* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1984).

<sup>9</sup> Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz, "Introduction," in *Feminist Theory and the Classics*, ed. Linda Nicholson (NY: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-7.

trend or a recent fascination, but a significant issue that was raised as far back as the 19th century.

A multitude of themes has been extensively researched since the time of Meyer Reynolds. Publications such as Susan Wiltshire's "Greece, Rome, and the Bill of Rights"<sup>11</sup> and Paul Rahe's "Republics Ancient and Modern: Classical Republicanism and the American Revolution"<sup>12</sup> trace the contribution of ancient heritage to the formation of the United States. One of the pioneers examining the reception of antiquity in America has been Mary Wyke, whose inquiry into the facets of gender and visual portrayal of the classical heritage may be termed "imagology". Wyke was among the first who research the representation of antiquity in cinema, manifested in her work "Projecting the Past: Ancient Rome, Cinema, and History".<sup>13</sup> Her interests are not limited to visual images alone, having authored several works on the figure of Julius Caesar,<sup>14</sup> in addition to dedicating a book to perceptions of the Roman woman in America.<sup>15</sup>

The theme of visually interpreting ancient heritage within the United States found further development in the scholarly contributions of Margaret Malamud. Expanding beyond the realm of cinema,<sup>16</sup> she researched a plethora of topics within visual history. The foundation of her academic enquiry was constituted by the exploration of ancient Roman motifs in the cities such as Las Vegas<sup>17</sup> and New

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<sup>11</sup> Susan Ford Wiltshire, *Greece, Rome, and the Bill of Rights* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992).

<sup>12</sup> Paul Anthony Rahe, *Republics Ancient and Modern: Classical Republicanism and the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

<sup>13</sup> Maria Wyke, *Projecting the Past: Ancient Rome, Cinema, and History* (NY: Routledge, 1997).

<sup>14</sup> Maria Wyke, "Caesar, Cinema, and National Identity in the 1910s," in *Caesar: A Life in Western Culture*, ed. Maria Wyke (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 170-89; *Maria Wyke, Caesar in the USA* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

<sup>15</sup> Maria Wyke, *The Roman Mistress: Ancient and Modern Representations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>16</sup> Margaret Malamud, "Brooklyn on the Tiber: Roman Comedy on Broadway and in Film," in *Imperial Projections: Ancient Rome in Modern Popular Culture* (Baltimore, 2001), 191-209.

<sup>17</sup> Margaret Malamud, "As the Romans Did? Theming Ancient Rome in Contemporary Las Vegas," *Arion* 6, no. 2 (1998): 11-39. Margaret Malamud and Donald T. McGuire Jr., "Living Like Romans in Las Vegas: The Roman World at Caesars Palace, 1966," in *Imperial Projections: Ancient Rome in Modern Popular Culture* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 249-69.

York<sup>18</sup>. These studies were not merely confined to architectural aesthetics and attempts at portraying a “static” cityscape, rather they dedicated to “dynamic” cultural practices like the circus, theatre, comedy shows and amusement parks.

Perhaps due to this expansive range of scholarly interests Margaret Malamud has had the capacity to aspire towards create the first comprehensive treatise regarding the influence of classical antiquity on the United States. Her book, “Ancient Rome and Modern America”<sup>19</sup>, spans from the colonial era to contemporary times, although it has no single narrative thread. The work is composed of a series of consecutive vignettes from American history, in which references to antiquity played a significant role. Malamud successfully illuminated the role of such references within American culture and politics, and the variety of social issues wherein Americans used the examples from the ancient history.

Efforts to compile a multitude of distinct topics under one cover, thereby to create a general picture of the antiquity’s reception are made in the form of compendiums. For instance, the collective volume “Classical Antiquity and the Politics of America: From George Washington to George W. Bush”<sup>20</sup> edited by classical scholar Michael Meckler, proclaims its ambition to sweeping purview spanning the entirely American history. However, this anthology’s scope is considerably more circumscribed, primarily concentrating on the reciprocal influences between classical education and US politics.

The aforementioned scholar, Carl Richard, proposed a holistic approach to the interpretation of the Greco-Roman legacy, albeit his research was dedicated to the antebellum era. The rationale for this particular chronological selection is articulated in the title of his book: “The Golden Age of the Classics in America: Greece, Rome, and the Antebellum United States”.<sup>21</sup> Naturally, the influence of

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<sup>18</sup> Margaret Malamud, "The Imperial Metropolis: Ancient Rome in Turn-of-the-Century New York City," *Arion* 7, no. 3 (2000): 64–108; Margaret Malamud, "Roman Entertainments for the Masses in Turn-of-the-Century New York," *The Classical World* 95, no. 1 (2001): 49-57.

<sup>19</sup> Malamud, *Ancient Rome*.

<sup>20</sup> Michael Meckler, ed., *Classical Antiquity and the Politics of America: From George Washington to George W. Bush* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2006).

<sup>21</sup> Carl John Richard, *The Golden Age of the Classics in America: Greece, Rome, and the Antebellum United States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

classical texts can be most profoundly traced during the period when they maintained an esteemed position within American culture. The author does not follow the traditional chronological principle of content presentation and instead researches the influence of antiquity through broader concepts such as “democracy”, “nationalism”, and “slavery”. In the book’s preface, Richard underscores the insufficiency of scholarly attention to the chosen topic,<sup>22</sup> while numerous works examining the role of antiquity during the era of the Founding Fathers have been published since his initial research; other periods of U.S. history still remain largely overlooked.

Among the neglected epochs is the turn of the 19th to the 20th century, a significant period in American history. This pertains to foreign policy, marking the advent of American imperialism following the triumph over Spain in the 1898 war, as well as within the domestic political sphere, when the Progressive Era has begun. While the political rhetoric of this epoch has been thoroughly researched, the study of the references to the historical examples of antiquity remains largely uncharted territory within academic discourse. Existing studies tend to focus either on domestic<sup>23</sup> or foreign policy,<sup>24</sup> leaving a gap for a comprehensive study that could provide a novel insight into American politics, culture, and everyday life through the lens of the reception of the Greco-Roman heritage within the United States.

**The object of the research** is the central and regional American newspapers at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. **The subject of the research** is references to ancient history, which were used in the discussions about the most important social issues in the periodical press.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid, Preface IX.

<sup>23</sup> Malamud, *Ancient Rome*, 98-122.

<sup>24</sup> Allerfeldt, “Rome, Race, and the Republic,” 297-323.

**The purpose of the study** is to consider the role of ancient history in the discussions about the main issues of the American public agenda at the turn of the 19th–20th centuries within newspaper publications: what narratives were the most popular, how the editor-in-chief’s political leanings or the audience’s type shaped the use of the classical heritage, the extent to which references to ancient history were crafted with deliberation and detail, as well as their comprehensibility to the average American voter.

**The objectives of this study** are delineated as follows:

1. Ascertain the nuanced incorporation of classical allusions within diverse media and comprehend their impact on public perception.
2. Investigate the integration of ancient historical references in the discourse surrounding domestic policy, specifically scrutinizing their influence on the ideas about the governmental and economic system of the United States.
3. Analyze the appeal to historical examples in the discourses of U.S. foreign policy, with a focal emphasis on the implications arising from the annexation of territories subsequent to the Spanish-American War.
4. Evaluate the uses of classical narratives in discussions about the societal positioning of women and further, to ascertain its role in the endorsement of emergent consumption behaviors related to personal care products and services within review articles and advertising.

### **Novelty of the study**

The proposed dissertation is poised to contribute to the academic sphere through the introduction of a vast array of sources from the American newspapers. This corpus of material has hitherto been scarcely utilized, both in the context of researching the reception of ancient history, and more broadly within American studies. The historian Andrey Salomatin previously highlighted in 2010 the immense potential for exploring pivotal moments in U.S. history as mirrored in the



press, made accessible via digital databases.<sup>25</sup> He particularly stressed the relevance of fin-de-siècle;<sup>26</sup> however, since then, these opportunities have remained largely untapped.

Scholars studying mass perceptions prior to the 20th century typically focus on the perspectives of elites or individuals, leaving a knowledge gap about the historical facts accessible to average Americans and, critically, the modes in which information about the past was presented to them. Using newspapers as a source provides an opportunity to substantially broaden our understanding in these areas, and even gain some insight into how readers themselves reacted to materials about the ancient history.

Moreover, the theoretical framework of memetics proved to be a heuristic device in this research. Memetics, a theory positing all information as elementary self-replicating particles or “memes”, offers valuable insights into peculiarities of the circulation patterns of examples from ancient history across different newspapers.

### **Theoretical and practical significance of the research**

The theoretical significance of this research lies in its innovative approaches to studying the reception of the classical heritage. Implementing memetics theory provides a more nuanced understanding of the difference between the political elite and average American citizens in referencing ancient history, and also aids in explicating why information on Greco-Roman civilization remained actively used in mass media despite the declining prestige of classical knowledge. An examination of readers’ letters to newspapers will furnish insights into the peculiarities of historical reception among ordinary American citizens, and the press materials themselves will provide indirect evidence about ancient narratives which intrigued American readers.

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<sup>25</sup> Aleksey Yurievich Salomatin, "Perspektivy izucheniya istorii amerikanskoy pechati," [in Russian] *Elektronnyy nauchno-obrazovatel'nyy zhurnal Istoriya* 1, no. 4 (2010), 3-4.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that this research brings to the scientific domain an extensive array of hitherto unexplored primary sources. Concurrently, this dissertation aims at categorizing American newspaper publications, an endeavor that may prove beneficial for subsequent research endeavors focused on U.S periodicals.

From a practical perspective, the dissertation's content and conclusions can be incorporated into the development of lecture series, seminar discussions, and educational resources.

### **Primary historical sources base**

The range of periodicals scrutinized within this research can be categorized based on key criteria such as geographic location, circulation, and funding sources. The last of these criteria merits special attention in this context. It is noteworthy to mention that during the first half of the 19th century, journalism had not yet become a self-sustaining business, thus the majority of newspapers were party-affiliated, being subsidized by political organizations or individuals endorsing certain ideologies.<sup>27</sup> Surely, not all press was inherently political or linked to political parties, for instance, business publications could be found in major cities like New York or Boston. However, as D. Baldastry's research indicates, even these city newspapers dedicated about half of their content to political issues, while rural periodicals devoted almost two-thirds of their materials to such topics.<sup>28</sup>

This research identifies four primary types of periodicals: minor political publications disseminated throughout various small-town locations across all states (henceforth "Political Newspapers"), politicized independent publications from major cities in the Northeast and West Coast of the United States (hereafter referred to as "Conservative Newspapers" or simply "Conservatives"), education-focused political press from the South and Midwest of the USA (subsequently referred to as "Reformed Newspapers" or "Reformers"), and large independent

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<sup>27</sup> Gerald J. Baldasty, *The Commercialization of News in The Nineteenth Century* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 1-240 passim.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 23.

newspapers from American urban centers (referred to henceforth as “Yellow Press”).

A considerable number of materials published in the American newspapers of that period consisted of excerpts from more extensive works featured in magazines such as *The North American Review* or *The Nation*. This research refers to the full versions of these articles, providing valuable insight into the editorial decisions that determined which specific segments, particularly those associated with antiquity, were selected and whether the newspapers’ editors altered the original authors’ point of view.

American newspapers also reprinted excerpts from U.S. Congressional speeches or official documents, such as fragments from the Monetary Commission’s report of 1876,<sup>29</sup> which have been incorporated into this study. However, the orations of politicians resonated not solely within parliament, but also reached the electorate through the pamphlets. For instance, classical antiquity was a main theme in works such as “Coin’s Financial School”<sup>30</sup> by William Harvey<sup>31</sup>, “Wealth against Commonwealth”<sup>32</sup> by Henry Demarest Lloyd, “Two Pages from Roman History”<sup>33</sup> by Daniel De Leon, and “The American Idea”<sup>34</sup> by Lydia Commander.

American newspaper audience was reading not only excerpts from public addresses, but also reviews of fundamental studies. Various periodicals published commentaries of newly released historical researches and occasionally engaged in polemics with its theses. Among the prominent history works worth mentioning

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<sup>29</sup> *Report and Accompanying Documents of the United States Monetary Commission, Organized Under Joint Resolution of August 15, 1876* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1877), 1: 78.

<sup>30</sup> William Hope Harvey, *Coin’s Financial School* (Chicago: Coin Publishing Company, 1894).

<sup>31</sup> «Coin» – sobriquet of William Harvey

<sup>32</sup> Henry Demarest Lloyd, *Wealth Against Commonwealth* (NY: Harper & Brothers, 1894).

<sup>33</sup> Daniel De Leon, *Two Pages from Roman History* (NY, National Executive Committee, Socialist Labor Party, 1915).

<sup>34</sup> Lydia Commander, *The American Idea: Does the National Tendency toward a Small Family Point to Race Suicide or Race Development?* (NY: A.S. Barnes & Co, 1907).

are “The Law of Civilization and Decay: An Essay on History”<sup>35</sup> and “American Economic Supremacy”<sup>36</sup> by Brooks Adams, John Fiske’s “American Political Ideas. Viewed from the Standpoint of Universal History”,<sup>37</sup> as well as more established works such as Sir Archibald Alison’s “History of Europe”<sup>38</sup> and James Froude’s “Caesar: A Sketch”.<sup>39</sup>

## Methodology

The research task of analyzing how Americans conceptualized the past and used historical references in public discourse and journalistic texts necessitates the application of a variety linguistic methods and interdisciplinary approaches. Discourse analysis, for instance, examines the exercise of power within society via linguistic instruments. A significant focus in this field pertains to issues of social, gender, and ethnic inequality. While such issues are not the primary interests of this dissertation, they cannot be disregarded. These issues, especially with the rise of socialist movements, the emergence of suffrage, and debates surrounding the destiny of indigenous populations residing in territories annexed during the Spanish-American War, became increasingly pertinent in late 19th-century America. Historical analogies could be used both to uphold the prevailing political system and to challenge its consistency and fairness. Therefore, it is imperative to study how the image of the “Other” was constructed and which historical examples were used for comparative purposes.

Another integral feature of American political discourse at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries was the conservative opposition to numerous reformist initiatives and progressive ideologies. A fundamental work within this realm is Albert Hirschman’s “The Rhetoric of Reaction: Perversity, Futility, Jeopardy” in

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<sup>35</sup> Brooks Adams, *The Law of Civilization and Decay: An Essay on History* (NY: The Macmillan Company, 1895).

<sup>36</sup> Brooks Adams, *America's Economic Supremacy* (NY: The Macmillan Company, 1900).

<sup>37</sup> John Fiske, *American Political Ideas. Viewed from the Standpoint of Universal History* (NY: Harper Brothers, 1885).

<sup>38</sup> Archibald Alison, *History of Europe, vol. I* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1852).

<sup>39</sup> James Anthony Froude, *Caesar: A Sketch* (London: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1886).

which he identifies three main strategies of anti-reformist argumentation in his title:

1. The Perversity Thesis: endeavors at improvement invariably yield diametrically opposite outcomes;
2. The Futility Thesis: attempts to change society will likely end up at a standstill;
3. The Jeopardy Thesis: innovations pose threats to already implemented reforms.<sup>40</sup>

According to Hirschman, most of the arguments against reforms in the social, political or economic realms can be reduced to these three main theses<sup>41</sup>, which he convincingly showed on extensive material in his study.

The historical perceptions of Americans have been analyzed by I. M. Savelyeva and A. V. Poletaev, however, their research titled “Social Representations of the Past, or Do Americans Know History” dedicated to a subsequent epoch. Moreover, their work based on a vast corpus of American sociological surveys.<sup>42</sup> Regrettably, such sources emerged only in the 20th century, necessitating alternative methodologies for discerning historical perceptions among U.S citizens in the present dissertation.

Information in newspapers often appeared to readers in the form of stereotypes, a term coined by Walter Lippman who was a journalist himself. He conceptualized stereotypes as cognitive schemas which help to filter and interpret information drawing upon the collective historical experience to comprehend the external world. The concept of stereotypes separates an individual’s knowledge about the world into two categories: personal experience and information received

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<sup>40</sup> Albert Otto Hirschman, *The Rhetoric of Reaction: Perversity, Futility, Jeopardy* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 1992) Translated by Artyom Smirnov as *Ritorika reaktsii: izvrashchenie, tshchetnost’, opasnost’* (Moscow: Izdatel’skiy Dom VShE., 2010), 145-147.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, 148.

<sup>42</sup> Irina Maximovna Savelyeva and Andrey Vladimirovich Poletaev, *Sotsial’nye predstavleniya o proshlom, ili znayut li amerikantsy istoriyu* [in Russian] (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2008).

from others. While the first category operates clear concepts, the latter is only dealt with in the form of broad generalizations.<sup>43</sup>

Russian historian Viktoria Zhuravleva appeal stereotypes in her fundamental work “Understanding Russia in the United States: Images and Myths, 1881–1914”. Zhuravleva adopts this theoretical framework within the broader methodology of imagology of international relations, which focuses on the dichotomy of “Self and Other”<sup>44</sup>. She examines not only American stereotypes about Russia, but also their oversimplified self-perceptions. These constructs are intertwined and often mirror each other. The formulation of unique self-identity often necessitates the attribution of contrasting characteristics to “Other” cultures and nations.

In an effort to comprehend the mechanisms underlying the spread of information, this research employs memetics or meme theory. Within this methodology, memes are perceived as units of cultural information which are able to indefinite self-replication and frequent mutations. These units encompass a wide range of elements, such as music melodies (exemplified by the opening sequence of Beethoven’s Symphony No. 5), catchphrases (McDonald’s “I’m loving it”), fashion trends (such as jeans or chokers), and dance movements (like Elvis Presley’s iconic stage performances), and so forth.

The terming “meme”, formulated analogously to “gene”, was first presented to the academic world by Richard Dawkins in his “The Selfish Gene”. However, the similar concepts existed in intellectual thought prior to his publication.<sup>45</sup> The term “memetics” was coined by the American physicist and computer scientist Douglas Hofstadter,<sup>46</sup> whose interest lay in the examination of memplexes – clusters of memes, ideas and concepts which are also susceptible to continual

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<sup>43</sup> Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York: Macmillan, 1922) Translated by Tatyana Barchunova as *Obshchestvennoe mnenie* (Moscow: Institut fonda "Obshchestvennoe mnenie", 2004), 95-107.

<sup>44</sup> Zhuravleva Victoria Yurievna, *Ponimanie Rossii v SShA: obrazy i mify 1881–1914* [in Russian] (Moscow: RGGU, 2012), 15-17.

<sup>45</sup> Douglas Hofstadter, "On Viral Sentences and Self-Replicating Structures," in *Metamagical Themas: Questing for the Essence of Mind and Pattern* (NY: Basic Books, 1985), 64-65.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, 65.

modification. In his analysis of memplexes,<sup>47</sup> Hofstadter identified a “hook” – an element that encourages further propagation of the information, and “bait” – a component intended to attract attention and camouflage the “hook”.<sup>48</sup> A memplex could consist of multiple “baits” and “hooks”, their principal value depends on effectiveness of memplexes’ dissemination.

Central critiques leveled against memetics are based on too literal understanding of analogies from other sciences, for example, the desire to find a precise location of memes<sup>49</sup> or laws of their replication and mutation.<sup>50</sup> However, the essence of memetics is not reduced to perceive memes as a cultural equivalent to machine instructions or genes, rather, all are variations of replicators. The main contribution of memetics lies in its capacity to offer an innovative prism through which routine processes of information dissemination can be viewed from the perspective of the information itself.

Indeed, memetics has certain limitations: it is valuable in understanding the causes underlying the popularity of information and the mechanisms facilitating its propagation, but it falls short in explicating the different interpretation of identical historical exemplars. The main question is whether politicians and the media could impose not merely historical analogues, but also their interpretation of societal issues. The framing of this issue aligns it closely with the agenda-setting theory. The fundamental assertion of this theoretical framework, as posited by B. Cohen, is stated that the media “may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling people what to think about”.<sup>51</sup> Politicians could compare Ancient Greece and Rome with contemporary America pertinent, yet voters were not necessarily inclined to draw the same conclusions.

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<sup>47</sup> However, Hofstadter himself did not refer to them as memplexes, but as schemes.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 54-55.

<sup>49</sup> Alister Edgar McGrath, *Dawkins' God: Genes, Memes, and the Meaning of Life* (New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell, 2004), 128-130; Luis Benitez-Bribiesca, "Memetics: A Dangerous Idea," *Interciecia* 26, no. 1 (2001): 29-31.

<sup>50</sup> Alister Edgar McGrath, *Dawkins' God*, 131-134.

<sup>51</sup> Bernard Cecil Cohen, *The Press and Foreign Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 20.

Different interpretations of identical historical incidents frequently connected to the political views of the interpreter. The correlation between ideological convictions and historical understanding was elaborated by Hayden White in his fundamental work, “Metahistory”. By the term ideology, he was not referring to particular political movements, but rather to frameworks for comprehending contemporary events and concepts about the lessons that humanities can impart.<sup>52</sup> Drawing upon the methodology of Karl Mannheim, White identified four distinct ideologies in the 19th-century historical imagination, contingent on the perception of time: anarchism (viewing the ideal state of humanity as located in the past, attainable at any moment), radicalism (placing the ideal in the imminent future, with its realization deemed inevitable), conservatism (locating the ideal within the contemporary era), and liberalism (postulating the ideal in the distant future, believing its realization to be impossible through rapid transition, only through a gradual progression).<sup>53</sup>

**The chronological framework of the research**, as suggested by the title, span across the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. This period is traditionally called the Progressive Era, because it is notable for its significant reforms and marked shift in the trajectory of the United States’ development, usually dating from the 1890s to the 1920s in historiography. However, for the purpose of this research, the beginning of World War I has been designated as the concluding chronological boundary, given its huge transformative impact on the American political landscape, which indeed needs its own dedicated research.

### **Statements for defense**

1. Within the academic landscape of historical research focused on the United States at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, the American periodical press remains a largely untapped source. This corpus of materials presents an

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<sup>52</sup> Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 22.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 22-25.



opportunity to enhance our understanding of historical reception and the evolution of collective memory, it even possible to identify the predominant images of the past, comprehend how these representations were modernized to resonate with a mass audience. Reports about meetings of numerous educational clubs and readers' letters to newspapers are also a valuable source of the reception of antiquity by ordinary Americans, which has not yet been used in historiography.

1. The proliferation of references to ancient history within the American press during the fin-de-siècle coincided with a noteworthy increase in newspaper circulation. This growth, paradoxically, transpired amidst a deficit of professional journalists and copywriters. The consequential scarce of original materials compelled editors to recurrently draw upon the transcripts of political orations and the reprinting of content from other media. Such materials frequently contained mentions on ancient history – a subject still well-known and actively used in political rhetoric by educated Americans.

2. The emergence of yellow journalism represented a transformative shift in media landscape, new kind of press differentiating itself from the traditionally politicized party and didactic publications. Its using of history was less anchored in advocating for particular ideologies or social reforms, and instead, yellow journalism fostered consumer culture, promoting new way of life and specific products and services.

3. A prevalent rhetorical strategy in the American mass media landscape of the late 19th to early 20th century entailed the hyperbolization of threats and making ominous prophecies which outcomes related to various societal phenomena. The fall of Rome emerged as a favored historical precedent for the alarmists, ranging from opponents of suffragism to advocates of free silver coinage. To strengthen their claims, they were making direct comparisons between contemporary America and Ancient Rome, emphasizing the cyclical nature of history and the inevitable replication of Rome's fate unless appropriate societal adjustments were promptly enacted.

4. The dissemination of populist program by the Democrats in the 1896 electoral campaign occasioned a reductionism in their main tenets, which was manifested in the devolution from memplexes to discrete memes. The historical analogies of the left-wing educational publications were reduced by the Democrats to the thesis that the fall of Rome was caused by the depletion of precious metal mines.

5. Opponents of leftist ideologies regularly made references to Plato's "Republic" and the historical example of Sparta. They used Plato's work as evidence that the theories proposed by Edward Bellamy and other left-wing thinkers were mere utopian fantasies with no grounding in reality. Sparta was depicted as the first attempt to construct a socialist state, marked by fear, violence, and citizen subjugation, which, they argued, implied that the execution of populist plans would unavoidably yield similar outcomes.

6. Ancient history served as a significant intellectual resource for the nascent feminist movement in America. The portrayals of Greek and Roman women not only provided motivation but also stood as concrete evidence of the intellectual capabilities of women being equivalent to those of men. The absence of esteemed female figures, such as Aspasia and Hypatia, in other cultures and historical eras was attributed to the socio-cultural constraints inhibiting women's self-expression. While moderate feminists highlighted the superiority of the ancient Greek and Roman societies, urging for their emulation, their radical counterparts underscored the ubiquitous disenfranchisement of women across cultures, including the Hellenes, Romans, and Americans. They posited these historical instances as exceptions rather than the norm, thereby call for the reformation of this status quo.

7. Following the acquisition of overseas territories in the aftermath of the Spanish-American War, there emerged a shift in political rhetoric that began to justify the Roman Empire as a model for the United States. The prevailing public sentiment held that the fall of the Roman Empire was not due to its expansionist foreign policy, but because of its paganism. It was posited that the Christian values of America would prevent the repetition of Rome's fate.

## **Structure and outline of the work**

This study consists of an introduction, four chapters, a conclusion, a list of sources, and literature.

In **the first chapter**, sources of information about ancient history and culture in the USA are thoroughly analyzed. These sources provided a strong starting position for antiquity at a time marked by an expansion in the number of newspapers and their respective circulations. The principles of information dissemination within newspapers themselves are explained through memetics, and the next part of the chapter shows the diverse specificity of large narrative frameworks (memeplexes) and particular facts (discrete memes). *The first paragraph* deals with memeplexes. They were mainly found on the pages of Conservative and Reformist publications, which tried to provide their readers with serious analytical materials. The content within the Reformist press was specifically tailored for an audience with limited prior knowledge of ancient history, and as a consequence, such texts were rendered in more meticulous detail. *The second paragraph* sheds light on discrete memes, which predominantly featured in the party-affiliated newspapers and the yellow press. In the first type of periodicals, propagandistic materials with primitive analogies from ancient history were circulated, while the second type contained all sorts of entertaining facts and amusing stories.

**Chapter two** surveys the uses of ancient history in discussions of socio-economic issues which worried the American public. The first section scrutinizes materials focused on public morality debates. A substantial number of fervent activists, voicing their opposition to professional sports, taverns, and looser sexual morals in America, drew comparisons with the Roman Empire, correlating its decline with these very elements. However, descriptions of the Romans' remarkable luxury and ostentatious amusements often led to the opposite effect, aroused sincere interest rather than disdain. Images of imperial opulence began to circulate in advertising, and the press abounded with accounts of the extravagant

expenditures of emperors and their wives, designed to astound the reader's imagination.

*The second paragraph* is dedicated to the presidential elections of 1896, during which the Democratic candidate, William Bryan, actively used the populist assertion about the necessity of coining free silver. Along with this thesis, the Democrats borrowed historical analogies referencing Roman history. However, in their pre-election rhetoric, only a few examples remained from the complex analytical argumentation of the populists, and these examples were actively circulated in democratic party-press. Newspapers attempted to portray Bryan as either a second Cicero or a new Tiberius Gracchus, but these attempts were not particularly successful.

*The third paragraph* analyzes the discursive strategies employed by adversaries of populism and leftist ideas in general. *The first subparagraph* explores the use of Plato's "Republic" to illustrate the conjecture that leftist philosophies are inherently utopian and hence, unachievable. However, such materials rarely dissected the philosopher's ideas, merely highlighting the fact that Plato's theory remained unrealized. *The second subparagraph* conducts an analysis of Sparta's representation. Opponents of socialism often framed this city-state as an actual manifestation of socialism, where the government effectively turned into an oppressive barracks. In this dystopian vision, an individual's existence was deemed insignificant and reduced to a constant humiliation and fear. This narrative was constructed with intent to persuade Americans that actual socialism could only be achieved through violence; moreover socialism failing to even brings about equality among the people, given that Sparta was inherently an oligarchic regime. This was underscored even by leftist publications, which criticized the Spartan political system more than their conservative counterparts, distancing themselves from this historical example.

**The third chapter** is devoted to references to the Roman Empire in the debate over US foreign policy. *The first paragraph* begins with an examination of the press's response to the Cuban uprising and its suppression by Spanish

authorities. Many newspapers supported the American intervention in Cuba to support rebellions in their struggle, also noting that Spain was a weak opponent for the USA. However, after the victory in the war of 1898, serious discussions began on the destiny of the liberated territories. A wide range of political forces opposed to the prospect of obtaining overseas possessions: from the distinguished steel magnate and Republican Party proponent Andrew Carnegie to the president of the American Federation of Labor Samuel Gompers. Their rhetoric was different, but all used the example of the Roman Empire. Anti-imperialist Republicans emphasized the importance of preserving political institutions, whose dismantling in Rome had paved the way for dictators to seize power. Democrats highlighted that annexation was an initiative of the current government, framing McKinley as a potential Caesar. Lastly, populists drew attention to big business's interest in the new territories, reiterating to Americans that the downfall of the Roman Republic was largely attributed to the plutocrats.

Proponents of territorial expansion frequently relied upon their nation's historical narratives, particularly events such as the Louisiana Purchase. A few tentatively justified the Roman Empire, but the overwhelming majority dismissed such historical analogies as irrelevant, confident in their belief of the United States as an exceptional nation, was immune to the fate of past empires. This thesis is expanded upon in *the second paragraph*, which traces the evolution of the Roman Empire's depiction in American newspapers at the onset of the 20th century. During this period, the portrayal of the Roman Empire became more favorable, highlighting various merits of the image of Imperial Rome.

**The fourth chapter** offers an exploration of the use of antiquity in forming the narrative about the ideal American woman. *The first paragraph* explores how the portrayals of acknowledged ancient beauties such as Cleopatra and Aspasia were employed to endorse various self-care practices in American newspapers, spanning from cosmetic advertisements to the anti-corset movement. Owing to antiquity's status as the epitome of natural beauty, there was an effort to draw a

lineage from these ancient practices, consequently normalizing new urban expenditures on beauty salons.

*The second paragraph* analyzes the use of the history of Ancient Greece and Rome in the rhetoric of suffragettes. They found the origins of this movement in antiquity, which made it possible to significantly make the history of feminism older, presenting it as a classical political trend supported by Plato and Aristophanes, and not as a temporary whim of modern American women. In addition, the postulation of Plato as a proponent of feminism gave more intellectual weight to this movement, sanctioned by one of the most influential thinkers in history. The perception of antiquity itself, however, could vary among the suffragettes. Some chose to idealize it, talked about gender harmony in ancient Greece that they wished to restore. Others, through newspaper articles, highlighted the subjugated position of women, which remaining unchanged since those ancient times, thereby voicing their demand for radical societal transformations. Lastly, the most prevalent viewpoint cleverly amalgamated both perspectives: it critiqued the societal status of women but accentuated notable exceptions like Sappho and Hypatia, who were proposed as role models for modern American girls.

*The third paragraph* examines the rhetoric of the opponents of suffragism, who also found the origins of this movement in the ancient past, simultaneously propagating two contrasting images of feminism in antiquity. On the one hand, they portrayed it as somewhat frivolous and even ridiculous. The comedies of Aristophanes were cited as satirical critiques of emancipated women of ancient times, many of whom appeared unsure about their actual objectives. Allusions to the Amazons were laced with caustic irony aimed not at celebrating the activists' bravery but at mocking their militancy. On the other hand, suffragism was depicted as a symptom of decay and moral decline. Alarmists referenced Rome as an example, claiming that emancipation inevitably leads to the family disintegration and the degeneration of the nation. However, the conservatives' rhetoric did not limit itself to negative examples. Through the periodical press, they presented exemplary antiquity women, whom they believed should serve as role models for

modern American women. A standout figure was Cornelia, the mother of the Gracchi brothers, who was renowned as the epitome of maternal ideals.

## **Conclusions**

At the end of the 19th century, the rapid growth of mass periodicals provided a platform for the propagation of knowledge pertaining to antiquity amongst the Americans. Newspapers increased its circulation, albeit their paucity of experienced journalists restrained the creation of original content. Consequently, the primary materials of American newspapers, spanning both central and provincial newspapers, were transcripts of speeches and reprints from other periodicals, including respectable magazines. These materials, in particular, were instrumental in disseminating the memes of ancient Greek and Roman history.

The images of antiquity began to play a significant role in the discussions about the place and position of women in the new urbanized society. This trend was largely attributable to the pursuit of women themselves in search of positive role models to emulate. They identified these exemplars in figures from the ancient world such as Aspasia and Cleopatra. The stories of these women, both renowned for their intelligence and beauty, resonated with two main demands of American women: the quest for intellectual enlightenment and the consumption of goods and services in a rapidly expanding beauty market. Anti-feminist critiques by American conservatives also centered on these figures, although the focus of these discussions shifted towards different aspects of their lives. For instance, attention was drawn to Aspasia's status as a hetaira and Cleopatra's relationship with the married Mark Antony.

Within the public discourse, vigorous disputes over the interpretation of historical figures from antiquity were infrequent occurrences. A consensus established in political commentary presented the Roman Republic and Athens were presented in a positive light, whilst Sparta and the Roman Empire were regarded as unequivocally negative examples of governmental system. Notably, the emphasis in political debates was placed on these negative examples;

newspapers repeatedly used them as a means to stoke apprehensions about the potential ramifications of endorsing a particular ideology or doctrine.

The frequently cited analogy of Rome's fall was employed by reformists as a tool to illuminate the perils of preserving the existing social order and upholding laissez-faire capitalism. Populists, noting striking parallels between the late Roman Republic and contemporary America, endeavored to persuade their compatriots of the high likelihood of history repeating itself. However, their arguments were confined predominantly to the limited publications of the National Press Reform Association. Populist rhetoric was adopted by the Democrats, who incorporated only the least radical elements of their program, specifically the demand for free silver coinage and anti-monopoly discourse. Yet, these notions were distilled to simplistic assertions in regional party publications and leading pro-Democratic newspapers: the refusal of silver was presented as the primary cause of Rome's fall and the implementation of bimetallism was portrayed as the panacea to America's economic problems.

The ominous fate of the illustrious ancient empire emerged as a principal argument against the annexation of overseas territories conquered during the Spanish-American War of 1898. The opposition within the ruling Republican Party voiced concerns that denying the people of the Philippines and Puerto Rico their self-governance rights could pave the way for despotism in the United States. Democrats from the South criticized the expansive politics more harshly, drawing analogies between President McKinley and Caesar and comparing the burgeoning American military forces to the Praetorian Guard. Populists argued that these territorial acquisitions were made in the interests of the monopolies, which established imperial rule in Rome and now posed a risk to the continuation of democracy in America.

The examination of varied press materials from the fin-de-siècle reveals a striking trend of using antiquity in discussions about different social issues. This epoch retained its esteemed status, which was an enduring tradition in America, tracing its historical continuity back to Ancient Greece and Rome since the era of



the founding fathers. For some, the past served as a trove of inspirational figures, while others perceived it as a repository of ominous warnings. Regardless, it was a relevant sphere of knowledge, through which Americans attempted to comprehend and even influence their reality. Many reformers proceeded from the premise that history repeats itself, thus implying that desirable events could be hastened, and unfavorable occurrences could be remedied in a new cycle. The relevance of antiquity in socially significant discussions was maintained because of the numerous dedicated propagators of its memes. However, as the 20th century progressed and those well-versed in the history of ancient Greece and Rome receded from politics, the memes of antiquity began to lose ground in the competition for a place in the meme pool.

### **The research approbation**

The reliability of the dissertation is based on an extensive complex of analyzed historical sources, relevant to the set goals and tasks, as well as methods used in the work. Some positions of this research have been verified at three international and two nationwide conferences.

1. International Conference “XX Sergeev Readings”. Moscow. January 31 - February 2, 2017. Moscow. MSU (M. V. Lomonosov Moscow State University). Presenter. Topic: “The Image of the Gracchi Brothers in Left Political Rhetoric in the USA at the Turn of the 19th–20th Century”.

2. V All-Russian Scientific Conference of Students, Postgraduates, and Young Scientists “Antiquity in the 21st Century”. Moscow. RSUH (Russian State University for the Humanities). March 17-18, 2017. RGGU. Presenter. Topic: “The Image of the Gracchi Brothers in American Periodical Press at the Turn of the 19th–20th Centuries”.

3. International Conference “Usable Past”, St. Petersburg. NRU HSE (National Research University Higher School of Economics) - St. Petersburg. April 21, 2018. Presenter. Topic: “The Legacy of Antiquity in Political Debates in the Presidential Elections of 1896”.

4. International conference “XXI Sergeyev Readings”. Moscow. MSU (M. V. Lomonosov Moscow State University). January 29-31, 2019. Presenter. Topic: “The Use of Antiquity in Materials for Women in the American Press at the End of the 19th Century”.

5. Annual Conference “Neo Classical Scholar”. Online. CSU (Chelyabinsk State University). April 28, 2021. Presenter. Topic: “The New Peloponnesian War: Athens and Sparta in American Political Rhetoric at the Turn of the 19th–20th Century”.

**List of author’s main publications in the journals, included in the list of high-level journals, recommended by HSE, as well as indexed by Scopus and Web of Science:**

1. Kondrashuk, Ruslan A. “Chary Kleopatry: ideal antichnoi krasoty na stranitsakh amerikanskoi pressy rubezha XIX i XX vekov” [Cleopatra's Charm: The Ideal of Ancient Beauty in the American Press at the Turn of the 19th and 20th Centuries.] *New and Contemporary History*, Vol. 1 (Spring 2021): 60-68.

2. Kondrashuk, Ruslan A. “Obraz Rimskoi imperii v amerikanskoi presse kontsa XIX veka / R.A. Kondrashuk” [Image of the Roman Empire in the American Press of the Late 19th Century.] *Dialogue with Time*, 76 (2021): 222-34.

3. Kondrashuk, Ruslan A. “Ispol'zovanie memetiki pri issledovanii retseptsii antichnosti v amerikanskoi presse rubezha XIX-XX vekov” [Using Memetics in the Study of the Reception of Antiquity in the American Press at the Turn of the 19th–20th Centuries] *Perm University Herald. History*, 59, no. 4 (2022): 140-51.