

Mission Statement

In recent years classicists have become increasingly aware that students from ethnic backgrounds other than white European and Asian are underrepresented in the study of Latin and Greek. Among those less likely to pursue these languages are particularly African-Americans, but the group also includes those of Hispanic and Native American descent.

An essential part of the solution to this problem lies in locating obvious role models, past and present, upon which these students can pattern themselves. This brochure is designed to help teachers, parents, students and administrators grapple with this important issue.

National Committee for Latin and Greek

VICE-CHAIR

Michele Valerie Ronnick
Department of Classics
Wayne State University
Detroit, MI 48202

EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

Judith Lynn Sebesta
Department of History
University of South Dakota
Vermillion, SD 57069

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www.promotelatin.org

Professor Judith Lynn Sebesta
Executive Secretary NCLG
Department of History
414 E. Clark Street
University of South Dakota
Vermillion SD 57069

Classica Africana:

The Influence of
Classical Studies on
People of
African Descent



BY

Michele Valerie Ronnick
Vice-Chair
National Committee for
Latin and Greek

William Sanders Scarborough

(1852-1926) was America's first professional classicist of African descent. His *First Lessons in Greek* was published in 1881.

Sarah Jane Woodson Early

(1825-1907) one of the first women of African descent to serve on a college faculty, and was made preceptress of English and Latin at Wilberforce University in 1865.

W.E.B. DuBois

(1868-1963) taught Cicero's *Pro Archia* to students in rural Tennessee in 1886, and served as chair of the classics department at Wilberforce University from 1894-1896.

Countee Cullen

(1903-1946) American poet, received special honors in Latin at New York City's De Witt Clinton High School in 1922.

Phillis Wheatley

(c. 1753-1784) an early American Poet, learned Latin and translated portions of the Roman poet Ovid.

It is a time for scholars and educators to look beyond the Martin Bernal-Mary Lefkowitz debate, and turn toward other types of research.

One of these new approaches is *Classica Africana*, a name patterned upon Meyer Reinhold's pioneering book, *Classica Americana* (1984), which examined the impact of classics upon eighteenth and nineteenth-century America. The new subfield sharpens the wide view taken by Reinhold concerning the influence of the Graeco-Roman heritage in America, and looks at the undeniable impact, both positive and negative, that this heritage has had upon people of African descent, not only in America but also in the Western World.

The past 400-500 years offer us many note-worthy examples of people of African descent who used their knowledge of classical studies in their creative and/or professional lives. This *terra incognita* of intellectual inquiry is worthy of attention today and tomorrow.

Zora Neale Hurston

(1903-1960) in her book *Dust Tracks on the Road*, described how she first drew attention to herself in grade school by reading the story of Pluto and Persephone aloud with zest and accuracy.

Charles W. Chesnutt

(1858-1932) before his career as a novelist and businessman, taught himself to read Latin. His daughter, Helen M. Chessnutt, was a Latin teacher in Cleveland, Ohio.

Langston Hughes

(1902-1967) an American poet, says that he was inspired by his high school Latin teacher.

Sarah "Sadie" Delany

(1889-1999) studied Greek at Saint Augustine's School in North Carolina with Professor Charles Boyer.

Paul Robeson

(1898-1976) tutored the son of his football coach at Rutgers, G. Foster Sanford Jr, in Latin and set the stage for Sanford's excellent record in Latin at the University of Pennsylvania.