

**A Brief History of Black Classicism in North Carolina:
Nine Portraits**

by Michele Valerie Ronnick



Helen Maria Chesnutt
portrait by Leo Rucker

Foreword

Gracing the cover of this pamphlet is the first-ever painted portrait of Helen Maria Chesnutt, the hard work and inspiration of Winston-Salem artist Leo Rucker. Helen Maria Chesnutt, as you will see later in this pamphlet, was a North Carolinian, a Black scholar of Classics, and the first African American woman ever to publish a Latin textbook.

Leo Rucker is partnering with the Wake Forest University Classics Department on not one but three portraits of Black North Carolina Classicists, which will become the crown jewels of the department's permanent collection. This pamphlet of biographies of North Carolina Classicists has been compiled by Professor Michele Valerie Ronnick, the world's leading expert on the history of Black scholars of Classics. Professor Ronnick has also generously lent to Wake Forest her world-renowned photographic installation *14 Black Classicists*. Together, Rucker's portrait and Ronnick's displays and essays make up an exhibit titled *Centering Black Classicists*, on view in the Ammons Room of the Z. Smith Reynolds Library at Wake Forest University from January through April 2020.

Centering Black Classicists is the longest-lasting portion of a series of events organized under the auspices of the Department of Classics for this academic year with the title CLASSICS BEYOND WHITENESS. Just as Wake Forest as an institution has recently acknowledged and been challenged to take steps to address its historical complicity with systems of white supremacy, the field of Classics must come to terms with its participation in abusive and exclusionary practices that have caused real and lasting harm to communities and students of color. Throughout the 2019–2020 academic year, the series has offered programming for students, faculty, and the larger Winston-Salem community that examines our field's misleading and damaging tendency to center "whiteness" in its scholarly and educational practices and charts new paths forward for a more inclusive, constructive vision of the discipline. Other events in the series include lectures on African American receptions of the Classics, the use of Classics by hate groups, and strategies to make Classics accessible to all; a workshop on white fragility and the Classics; a fall-semester course titled "Classics Beyond Whiteness" and a spring-semester seminar titled "Ancient Worlds, Modern Crises"; a screening of Spike Lee's *Chi-Raq*, an adaptation of Aristophanes' ancient Greek comedy *Lysistrata*; and a book group on Classics and misogyny in the digital age. This program celebrates the unique pedagogical, scholarly, and artistic contributions of Black Classicists, foregrounds the reception of Classical antiquity by artists and communities of color, highlights recent efforts to create a more diverse and inclusive field, and confronts the hateful backlash (both online and in professional settings) that has targeted those efforts.

The Classics Beyond Whiteness series is supported by the Wake Forest University Student Government, a Society for Classical Studies "Classics Everywhere" grant, a Classical Association of the Middle West and South Bridge Initiative Grant, Wake Forest University Provost's Fund for a Vibrant Campus, the Z. Smith Reynolds Library, the Wake Forest University Office of Diversity & Inclusion, the Wake Forest University Slavery, Race, and Memory Project, the Wake Forest University Undergraduate Research and Creative Activities Center, and the Wake Forest University Humanities Institute, which is in turn supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities.

*T. H. M. Gellar-Goad & Caitlin Hines
faculty, Wake Forest Department of Classics
organizers, Classics Beyond Whiteness series
January 17, 2020*

Remarks at the *Centering Black Classicists* exhibit opening Friday, January 17, 2020

by Dr. Eric Ashley Hairston, Associate Dean for Academic Advising
and University Associate Professor, Interdisciplinary Humanities,
Wake Forest University

Good afternoon.

Thank you for having me here for brief remarks this afternoon. I first want to observe that in an era where Classical Studies, Near Eastern Studies, and Medieval Studies and many other disciplinary areas are struggling to come to terms with full inclusion and critical honesty about race and representation, it is notable that Wake Forest is HERE in its more complex engagement with the classical world and classical reception. Second, I want to encourage you to read the works of these Black classicists, even as you enjoy coming face to face with them. The fact that we are in a mode of recovery and reintroduction of these scholars and their work is in part a matter of disciplines and knowledge progressing and some books and works being left behind. But, make no mistake, much of the reason why these figures must be *recovered* and re-introduced is because our civilization *desired* to erase them from history. As many of us who work, research, and publish in the area that Michele Valerie Ronnick described as *Classica Africana* know, the command of classical languages, philosophy, history, and culture was perceived at one time as the pinnacle of intellectual achievement, and for Black people to demonstrate their ability to command these areas and contribute to the cultivation of knowledge in the disciplines was a striking, visible undercutting of the argument that Blacks were not truly human, or if human, so limited as to be incapable of the highest intellectual achievement.

So, we have been used to seeing individual, rare lights like W. E. B. DuBois or Paul Lawrence Dunbar or Anna Julia Cooper or Zora Neale Hurston and believing this rarity to be truth. However, if we look closely, we can see many additional stars in the firmament — many more minds and creation and contributions. And those of us working classical reception, particularly *Classica Africana*, do this work of stargazing and mapping. But beyond the discipline, if we were more piercing, we would see relationships across more artificial American boundaries too, between DuBois and George Santayana, between Dunbar and the Wright brothers (yes, Orville and Wilbur, with whom he went to high school). We would see in novelist Charles Chesnutt an interdisciplinary marriage of literature and law, seeing him as novelist and legal stenography entrepreneur. We who have devoted our lives to teaching would revel in how the teacher, Helen Maria Chesnutt, labored in philology and helped inspire her student Langston Hughes. I want to encourage you all to continue the process of recovery and re-acquainting yourselves with all of those whom we have recovered. The firmament of intellect is far brighter than we have imagined.

In closing, I want you to note the North Carolinians among these classicists represented and discussed today, two of whom are Chesnutt and Cooper. You should know also how resonant and how close by this struggle for knowledge has been. Sitting here now, in this well-appointed library, we can forget how strenuously others have had to fight for knowledge in places very near to us. Long, long ago, in a small town not so far away, this battle between those who wanted to destroy knowledge and those who wanted to preserve their knowledge played out. In my hometown, the London High School in the London community of African Americans was an educational beacon for people of color in Northwest N. C. Before it, Blacks who wanted a high-school education had to go to schools

in Rockingham or Forsyth County. And when white leaders in my home county found that the segregation they fought for was coming to an end, in retribution they sought to close and demolish the school. The closure and destruction were averted, but on a chilly night, phones began ringing in the Black homes in the community with the message, “you’d better come to the school quickly; they’re burning the books.” School system workers were discarding books from the library and burning them in preparation for integration. I am told (because I’m not quite that old) that families reached into the piles to save what they could. Throughout my childhood I visited homes where small but brilliant libraries contained Cicero and Shakespeare and Douglass and DuBois and names that I did not see again until graduate school and the era of recovery. But, I will tell you, the burning did not do what the perpetrators thought it would. When we have books and people like these so freely, libraries can stand empty, but when you have to fight to recover and save knowledge, it is amazing how you cherish what you have. The burning was horrible, but it pushed those books off the stacks and into the homes of people formally educated and not, scholars and not, and it was from those libraries in my home and in others that I started reading — books like Helen Maria Chesnut’s *The Road to Latin* — and read until I ended up at Wake Forest so many years ago.

I invite you to keep defeating those who long to bury who we really are and, by diving into the works of these writers, keep the process of recovery and remembering robust and alive.

Thank you.

Remarks at the *Centering Black Classicists* exhibit opening Friday, January 17, 2020

*by Miles Middleton, Speaker of the House
Wake Forest University Student Government*

I would like to begin by expressing gratitude to the Classics Department for inviting me to speak. It is hard for me to express how pleased I am to be standing here, as Speaker of the House, as we join together to emphasize the importance of recognizing the historical silences surrounding the contributions of women and people of color within the Classics. This exhibition is important in and of itself — I urge you to take at least a few moments to truly digest what is shown before you. But I would like to recognize that everyone here is witnessing an important moment that expands beyond what you will experience today, that the Classics Department has undertaken an important task which I hope other academic areas will imitate. This event demonstrates what our University and its Departments should be progressing toward and the diverse backgrounds it should be representing within and beyond the classroom. I am extremely proud that our voting body decided to contribute to this extraordinary event — it is an important step toward a broadened academic awareness for the entire Wake Forest community.

The Senators of Student Government understood the importance and weight of this event, but it was students of the Classics Department who impressed upon our Senators the enormous value of the Classics Beyond Whiteness initiative. Jordan Houston and Zoe Schneider stood before the entire senate, an act which I imagine brought at least some nerves, and shared with us their love for a subject which often does not give credit to the accomplishments and perspectives of women and people of color. But they didn't stop with acknowledging the presence of silences; eloquently and passionately they spoke to us about what they have learned from classicists, some of whom are pictured here today, who have historically not had a place in academic curricula, despite their contributions. From their testimony, we understood as a collective that the only way to help expand the perspectives and minds of students, faculty, and administration on this campus is through doing events like this one. Through fighting for a future of education centered around the diverse contributions of each field's scholars, not simply those who are white. It is my hope, and I believe the hope of many others, that one day the accomplishments of all people can be represented fully in academia. And I love that the Classics Department has taken this leap forward in leading the charge to a more equitable system of education.

Thank you for taking this step forward and thank you for inviting me to have a small part in it.

Remarks at the *Centering Black Classicists* exhibit opening Friday, January 17, 2020

by Mellie Mesfin, Student Body President, Wake Forest University

Hello everyone. I'm so happy to be with you all today. I have frequently found myself in academic settings that have a single chapter, if that, dedicated to looking at a particular discipline through a multicultural lens. Only a brief moment, almost in passing, when the diversity within a field is referenced. This has begun to change over the years, with professors allowing more space for students to start those conversations, and offer their perspectives.

But what's happening today is not a subtle shift, but a deliberate refocusing. Not only is the diversity in the field of classics being acknowledged, but the contributions of Black scholars, leaders, and teachers are being explicitly highlighted and honored. Real work has been done to shine light on them as legitimate members of the Classics community. Art about Black people, by Black people. Pursuits like the one we're here to celebrate today not only make these fields more accessible and relatable to Black students, but establish Wake's study of the classics as a thorough one that is striving for inclusivity.

And Student Government is proud to be a part of that. we've spent a lot of this academic year thinking about how we can do our part to help make students feel more included and seen in every space on campus, and it's nice to be here with folks who believe in the importance of doing the same. I've seen first hand the difference that representation makes to students, and am excited to see how we as a university can keep moving in that direction.

Artist's Statement *by Leo Rucker*

As an artist, I've worked hard over the years to capture and develop paintings that speak both to me and others, from portraiture, landscapes, and pets, to still-life and beyond. In the early morning, as I rise, it is quiet, yet the sound of sleepy heads fills the house as I begin working to transform a blank canvas into a colorful and stunning conversation. We encounter people from all around the world at times throughout our lives who are special and unique individuals who walk through our doors to leave an everlasting impression. This is how it has been with my education and knowledge of 18 African Americans who played an important part in Greek and Latin education at Black Colleges in the United States, and especially three from North Carolina. The amazing and honorable chance as a portrait artist to capture these three elite educators on the canvas after connecting with the members of the Classics Department at Wake Forest University, who help to bring this project to life. This happened after being invited to sit in on a talk by Dr. Michele Ronnick, and it has truly been a career and craftsmanship change, to take my passion for art to a higher level and purpose.

A Brief History of Black Classicism In North Carolina: Nine Portraits

by Michele Valerie Ronnick

While watching the debates in the early 1990s between Martin Bernal and Mary Lefkowitz that were sparked by the first two volumes of his *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1987 and 1991), it seemed strange to me that there was no attention being paid to the educational history of people of African descent in classics. Because liberal arts education had meant classics for so many centuries in the West, and if people of African descent had been part of this system which they had been, then there must in fact be Black classicists. But where were they? Thus I began my search for and discovery of a tradition, which I named “Classica Africana,” and brought it to the attention of other classicists with a panel on the subject, the first of its kind, at the 128th meeting of the American Philological Association (APA) in New York City in 1996. I had discovered a towering figure, **William Sanders Scarborough**, and my edition of his 368-page autobiography — which I in fact found and which had never been published before — set the framework for the larger picture.

Let me tell you a bit about him. He was born in slavery in Macon, GA on February 16, 1852. His father, Jeremiah (c. 1822–1883), who had won his freedom some time before, worked for the Georgia Central Railroad. His mother Frances Gwynn (c. 1828–1912) worked for the man who owned her, William Kirkland DeGraffenreid (1821–1873), whose ancestors had founded New Berne, NC, in 1710. The DeGraffenreid family allowed the family many privileges. William was in fact helped by them with gifts of books. After his brother, John Henry and sister, Mary Louisa died, he became both the hope and the focus of his parents who encouraged their precocious son to learn to read and write albeit illegally. After the Civil War ended, Scarborough made rapid progress in the local school system. He then entered Atlanta University. He was the school’s most advanced student and was the only member of the senior class of 1869. After taking all the college courses offered, he joined Oberlin College’s class of 1875 and continued his study of Greek and Latin.

After a brief and unpleasant time teaching in the South — his first position, for example, at Lewis High School in Macon ended when the building was burned down by arsonists in 1876, and Ku Klux Klan outrages drove him from his second position at the Payne Institute in Cokesbury, SC, a few months later — he returned to Oberlin, and earned his M.A. degree. A short time later, he was appointed professor of ancient languages at Wilberforce University. Located in southwest Ohio, the school was founded in 1856 by the African Methodist Episcopal Church and named for the great English reformer William Wilberforce whose twenty-year campaign against slavery culminated in the Slave Abolition Act of 1833.

Scarborough made the most of his opportunity and soon became the consummate professional. With the publisher A.S. Barnes he published a 147-page beginner’s textbook for ancient Greek, *First Lessons in Greek*, in New York City in 1881. This rare book was reissued under my hand in a facsimile edition in 2019. The book brought him national recognition, and in the following year he joined the APA. The APA (renamed the Society for Classical Studies in 2013) is one of the earliest learned societies formed in the United States and its focus was on all languages, not just classical. His wife and kindred spirit was **Sarah C. B. Scarborough** (1851–1933), a woman of Caucasian descent with whom he had taught in Macon and later married in New York City on August 2, 1881. She was an 1875 graduate of the Oswego Teaching Institute in New York, and ran the high school teacher-training division at Wilberforce for many decades. In the course of their 45 years of marriage and his

44-year affiliation with the APA, Scarborough traveled frequently. He attended at least thirty meetings of the APA and summaries of twenty-four of the papers he presented are recorded in the *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* and itemized in my 2001 pamphlet, *The First Three African American Members of the American Philological Association*.

Scarborough's career marks the beginning of professional scholarly interest by an African American in philology in general, and in classical philology in particular. Scarborough's academic interests were wide and ranged from classical studies to Negro dialect and Negro fiction, Creole folklore, spelling reform initiatives, the place of modern languages the curriculum, and the African American artist Henry O. Tanner (1859–1937). In this way, he helped set the stage for the next three generations of African American philologists from the founder of Gullah language studies, Dr. Lorenzo Dow Turner (1890–1972), to current academic stars such as Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and Houston Baker, and classicists of African descent, as well. In 1884, two years after joining the APA, he became the first African American to join the Modern Language Association (MLA). As a result of my work establishing the date of his membership, the MLA has offered a book prize in his honor since 2001. He is of course my favorite subject, but I thought you would enjoy hearing about other Black classicists — those with direct connections to your own state, North Carolina.

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John Chavis

The foundational figure for North Carolina's place in the history of Black classicism is **John Chavis** (c. 1763–1838). He was born in Granville County, NC, and raised in Mecklenburg, VA. He studied at Liberty Hall Academy (now Washington and Lee University) in Lexington, VA, and at Princeton. In 1808, he opened a school in his home in Raleigh for students of both races to study the basics: Greek, Latin, and mathematics. He died in June of 1838 under mysterious circumstances, and is said to have been buried on the plantation of Willie P. Mangum (1792–1861), who, along with his brother Priestley (1795–1850), had been Chavis' students.

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Wiley Lane

From the next century is **Wiley Lane** (1852–1885). Lane was born of free, mixed-race parents, Whitmel (1824–1901) and Ruth Lane (1824–n.d.), in Elizabeth City, NC, on November 22, 1852. He caught the eye of **Thomas Whitmarsh Cardozo** (1838–1881), African American principal of the local grammar school, who encouraged Wiley to go on to Howard University. Cardozo told his brother **Francis Lewis Cardozo** (c. 1836–1903), who was Howard’s Professor of Latin, about Lane. Lane entered the Preparatory Department at Howard in 1870, moved on to the college department and graduated with highest honors in 1877.

Lane then joined the junior class at Amherst College, and graduated Phi Beta Kappa in 1879. Julius Seelye (1824–1895), the college’s president, was overheard describing Lane as “a universal favorite both with teachers and pupils.” **Reverend Francis Grimké** (1850–1937), Presbyterian minister of African descent, recalled William Seymour Tyler (1810–1897), classics professor at Amherst for 61 years, praising Lane as:

quite above the middle of his class [who] showed an uncommon accuracy and aptitude for the Greek language both in regard to its grammatical structure and lexicography, and also its literature. He stood in the first third of his class, so as to be entitled to the honor which he received of a nomination by the faculty and an election by the students as a member of the Phi Beta Kappa Society.

Three months after his graduation, Lane was appointed an instructor in the Normal Department of Howard University and later became the department’s principal. In 1881, he received the degree of A.M. at Howard, and in 1883, Lane was elected Professor of Greek Language and Literature in the College Department. The appointment, the first of its kind, was not without controversy, but Lane’s friends had supported him.

Once in place, Lane quickly earned a name for himself as an enthusiastic teacher. According to his colleague, James Monroe Gregory (1849–1915), professor of Latin at Howard University, Lane taught more than “mere forms of parsing and technicalities of grammar”:

I have known teachers who paid more attention to the mechanical part of their work as professors of Latin and Greek, . . . but I never knew one so young who more comprehensively grasped the thought and purpose of the author. To instruct in the substance rather than in the shadow, this was his idea of giving information in the class-room.

To enhance his teaching, he had been making plans to go to Athens, but all was cut short when he died suddenly of pneumonia on February 16, 1895.

His memorial service was attended by the President of Howard University, William Weston Patton (1821–1889). Among the eulogists was **Frederick Douglass** (c. 1818–1895), Reverend Francis Grimké and his colleague Professor Gregory. Gregory likened his friendship with Lane to that of Virgil and Horace. He said:

He was my junior in age only [but] I yield to him in learning and attainment. I entered the university first; in order of time I should have been the first to leave it; and, too, I think with Laelius, when speaking after the death of his friend Scipio Africanus: “It had been more equitable that as I entered upon life first, I should likewise first depart from it.” In giving instruction to his classes, he was not content with a mere translation of the authors prescribed in the curriculum, but he sought information from every source; he required his pupils in the preparation of lessons to examine ancient geography, Grecian mythology and antiquities.

Professor Lane was not yet 33.

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Orishatukeh Faduma

Our third subject is **Orishatukeh Faduma** (1857–1946). Faduma was born in Demerara, British Guyana on September 25, 1857. His parents, John and Omolofi Faduma, had been captured from their home in Yorubaland by slavers, but were rescued by a British sea patrol and brought to British Guyana. After seven years, his parents returned to Africa and settled in the western part of Sierra Leone. He was educated by Wesleyan church missionaries including the founder of the Wesleyan Boys High School, the Yoruba-born **Reverend J. Claudius May** (1845–1902). From 1882 to 1885, he studied in England, before returning to Sierra Leone, where he was the Senior Master at the Wesleyan High School. In August of 1887, he stopped using his baptismal name (William J. Davies or Davis), in favor of an African name.

The brother of J. Claudius May, **T. Cornelius May** (1857–1929), said that Faduma decided to move to the United States in search of better opportunities. After employment by the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia as a teacher, he moved to another African Methodist Church-supported school, the Kittrell Normal and Industrial Institute in Kittrell, NC, where he became principal in 1891.

Faduma then matriculated at Yale Divinity School, graduating with a B.D. in 1894, with an extra year at Yale University spent studying the philosophy of religion and Semitic languages. He was ordained a Congregational minister in the following year and married **Henrietta Rebecca Adams** (1865–1948), an 1891 graduate of Atlanta University's Normal School for Teachers. He became superintendent of the Peabody Academy in Troy, NC, and he and his wife worked there until 1914.

He returned to Freetown to serve a two-year stint as principal of the United Methodist Church Collegiate School, where he encouraged the study of vernacular languages, Arabic, Negro history, and African folklore. After five years as inspector and officer in the Department of Education of Model Schools in Sierra Leone, he returned to the United States and taught Latin, ancient and modern history, and English literature at Lincoln Academy in King's Mount, NC, until 1934. Faduma ended his career teaching Latin, Greek, French, and African history at the Virginia Theological Seminary in Lynchburg, VA.

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Anna Julia Cooper

Our fourth subject is **Anna Julia Cooper** (1858–1964). She was a phenomenon with a life that spanned more than a century. Dying in 1964 at 105 years old, she had lived from the days of slave auctions to the era of civil rights. She was born in slavery in Raleigh, NC. Her mother belonged to a white landowner named Dr. F. J. Haywood, Sr, and he (or his brother George Washington Haywood) was her father. She was one of the first students at St. Augustine College, an Episcopal school located in Raleigh, NC. Determined to study the classical curriculum normally given to boys, she was the first girl allowed to study Greek there. After graduation, she taught Greek, Latin, and math, and also married her Greek professor. The marriage was soon ended. Her husband, George A. Christopher Cooper, from the island of Nassau, died on September 27, 1879. The 23-year-old widow moved to Ohio to attend Oberlin College in 1881. Again she had to convince the officials to drop the gender barrier and let her enroll in the “Gentlemen’s course,” which was based on classical studies. She later wrote: “The fact is that the Negro’s ability to work had never been called in question, while his ability to learn Latin and to construe Greek syntax needed to be proved to sneering critics.”

After graduating with a B.A. in math in 1884, she taught for a year at Wilberforce University. In 1885, she joined the faculty at the Preparatory High School for Colored Youth in Washington, D.C. (a.k.a. the M Street School), where she taught Latin and was principal from 1902 to 1906. She was chair of languages at Lincoln University in Jefferson City, MO, until 1910, after which she returned to the M Street School, where she taught Latin until retiring in 1930.

In 1914, at the age of fifty-six, she began work at Columbia University on her doctorate. With her credits transferred to the Sorbonne, she earned her doctorate March 23, 1925, with a dissertation about French attitudes about slavery, “L’attitude de la France à l’égard de l’esclavage pendant la Révolution.” She was sixty-six, the first former slave to earn a doctorate at the Sorbonne, and the fourth Black woman to earn a doctorate in the United States.

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Pinckney Warren Russell

Our next pen portrait is of **Pinckney Warren Russell**, who was born in Newberry, SC, on April 4, 1864. His parents were Madison and Rachel (Williams) Russell. His early studies were at the Hoge School for colored children in Newberry, a school named for Solomon Lafayette Hoge (1836–1909), Union soldier, lawyer and judge. But he lost his parents and began to work at a cotton processing plant at Pelzer, SC. Around 1884, he enrolled at Biddle University, a Presbyterian institution, and graduated with honors from the college course in 1890. He began to study theology at Biddle and later earned his D. D. at Lincoln University, PA. After a few years teaching in Goldsboro, NC, he returned to Biddle as an assistant teacher. He served for three years as the principal of Biddle’s college

preparatory, and he was promoted to the chair of Greek, teaching both ancient and New Testament Greek. He was associated with the school from 1899 to 1938, and served as a dean twice in the 1920s. Russell became a member of the Classical Association of the Middle West and South in 1917 and joined the American Philological Association in 1920.

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Charles Henry Boyer

Our sixth subject is **Charles Henry Boyer**. He was born in Elkton, MD, in November of 1870. His father was Edward Boyer, cook, butler and Civil War veteran. His mother was Indiana Clinton Caldwell. After graduation from the Institute for Colored Youth in Philadelphia in 1886, he taught school in Charlotte Hall, MD. From 1890 to 1892, he studied in the college preparatory unit of the venerable Hopkins Grammar School in New Haven, CT. He matriculated at Yale and, after earning his B.A. in English in 1896, he became professor of Greek and mathematics at St. Augustine’s College. He was appointed dean, and worked unceasingly to raise the standards of the school to match those of an accredited college. He gave his attention to both academics and athletics. In 1925, he joined the APA. A poem, “Dean Charles H. Boyer: Heroic couplets—After the Manner of Dryden and Pope,” published in 1936, summed up his teaching philosophy: “No easy road did he ever seek to make his pupils learn Latin and Greek.”

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James Emman Kwegyir Aggrey

Our seventh portrait concerns **James Emman Kwegyir Aggrey**, who was one of the leading figures in the history of education in Africa. He was born October 18, 1875, at Anomabo in the Gold Coast of Africa, to Abena and Okyeame Kwegyir, Chief Linguist in the court of King Amonoo V of

Anomabu. Shortly before his eighth birthday, he entered the Wesleyan School in Cape Coast. He was an adept student and was taken by Reverend Dennis Kemp into the Wesleyan mission house for training. Aggrey flourished and was quoted as saying many times, “I want to know everything.” Aggrey became a member of the staff of the Wesleyan Memorial School and taught for many years. Studying for Aggrey became a lifestyle, and as he prepared for the Cambridge Local Examination, he would trade lessons in Fanti for lessons in French, Latin, and psychology. He was proud of himself and said, “When I was being trained for the ministry, I ranked first in Greek, in Latin, in Bible History, in Logic, in Exegesis. Yes, first in everything.”

At age 20, he became Assistant Headmaster at the Wesleyan Centenary Memorial School and, later, Headmaster. He passed all the Teachers’ Certificate examinations offered by the Department of Education and qualified “to teach in any similar school in any British Colony, the world over.” In July of 1898, Aggrey sailed to the United States, and he enrolled in Livingstone College in Salisbury, NC, a school supported by the A.M.E. Zion Church. Courses there included authors such as Homer, Hesiod, Aeschylus, Xenophon, Plato, and Demosthenes in Greek; and Cicero, Livy, Vergil, Juvenal, and Tacitus in Latin. In 1902, Aggrey graduated with honors and facility in German French, Ancient Greek, and Latin. In the same year, he delivered a Latin salutatory at Commencement and had earlier delivered the first Greek oration ever heard at the college.

On November 8, 1905, Aggrey married **Rosebud Douglas** of Portsmouth, VA, and started a family. Believing that unborn children could be influenced before birth, he surrounded her with beautiful pictures and read Horace’s *Odes* and *Epistles* with her. Between the years 1912 and 1915, he began work on his doctorate at Columbia but was interrupted by an extended research trip to Africa sponsored by the Phelps Stokes Fund. During this time, he met future leaders such as Malawi’s **Hastings Banda** and Ghana’s **Kwame N’krumah**. In July 1924, he joined the staff of Achimota College in Accra, the capitol city of Ghana, and designed the school crest. It was patterned on his idea that the races could be in harmonious union, like a keyboard, with the tag *ut omnes unum sint*. In May 1927, he left for the United States, but died of meningitis in Harlem on 30 July. He was mourned across 2 continents. At Livingstone College, two thousand mourners, white and Black, attended the service, and one of the guests, Kwame N’krumah, took soil from north Carolina back to Ghana.

Charlotte Hawkins Brown

Next is Charlotte Hawkins Brown, who was the granddaughter of enslaved persons. She was born on June 11, 1883, in Henderson, NC, and moved north with her family in the late 1880s to Cambridge, MA, where she attended the Cambridge English High School. She earned extra money by taking care of babies and she was observed pushing a pram with one hand, and with the other holding up her book to read a page of Vergil by Alice Freeman Palmer (1855–1902). Palmer, the first woman head of a nationally known college in the United States (Wellesley College), was impressed. She became Charlotte’s sponsor, helping her attend the State Normal School for Teachers in Salem, MA.

Upon graduation, Hawkins accepted a teaching position in a one-room school in Sedalia, NC. The school became a junior college and was renamed the Palmer Memorial Institute in honor of her benefactor. School administrators in NC did not support college training for Black students. But Charlotte managed to put Latin into her curriculum. By the end of World War I, the school bulletin listed courses on Cicero’s orations. By 1935, a four-year program of Latin was offered, with French as an option, and the same program was in place years later after Brown retired in 1952.

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Helen Maria Chesnutt

Our final portrait concerns Helen Maria Chesnutt. She was born on December 6, 1880, in Fayetteville, NC. She was the second daughter of the acclaimed African American novelist, **Charles Chesnutt**, who taught himself Latin. When the family moved to Cleveland, she and her sister **Ethel** entered Central High School and both took the classical course. In June of 1897, Helen graduated, and in the fall, she joined her sister as her roommate at Smith College in Northampton, MA. She earned her B.A. from Smith College in 1902 and was the third Black student to graduate.

Documents from the archives at Smith College reveal that both Helen and Ethel took four years of Latin and one of Greek. But they did experience bias. In a diary entry from January 9, 1899, Mary Augusta Jordan, one of Smith’s English professors, observed: “Then I had a sad interview with the younger Miss Chesnutt. They are experiencing the color line in a place where they ought to be secure. I appealed to the President who proposes to take a hand himself.” The president was L. Clark Seelye (1837–1924), the brother of the man who had praised Wiley Lane at Amherst. What he did is not known, for his papers make no mention of it.

Helen’s career was spent in Cleveland, teaching Latin at Central High School. She invigorated her classroom in various ways, such as celebrating the bimillennium of Vergil’s birth. In 1925, she earned an M.A. in Latin from Columbia University, and in 1932, Chesnutt co-authored with Martha Olivenbaum and Nellie Rosebaugh a beginning Latin textbook, *The Road to Latin*, published by John C. Winston Company. The book was a success. It was reviewed favorably in the *Classical Outlook*, *Classical Weekly*, and *Classical World*, and was published again in 1938, 1945, and 1949. She was member of the American Philological Association from 1920 through 1934.

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