

## Latin Mottoes at Historically Black Colleges and Universities

Scholars who are working in the new sub-field of the classical tradition known as black classicism (a.k.a. *Classica Africana*) realize that there are two broad divisions of research. One is the analysis of the classical legacy as it appears in the art and literature created by people of African descent. As examples of the latter, we have the first novel of W.E.B. Du Bois, *Quest of the Silver Fleece* (1911), which is a reworking of the myth of Jason and Medea, the poetry of Latinist Carl Phillips and/or the experimental novels of Percival Everett, *For Her Dark Skin* (1990) and *Frenzy* (1997) which are based on the myths of Medea and Dionysus respectively. The former division involves the recovery and analysis of materials pertaining to classical pedagogy. It requires a researcher to gain a close knowledge of how classical studies were disseminated by professors and students inside the college/university system as well as through various scholarly associations, and it relies by necessity upon the historical recovery of the “who, what, where, when, and how” of the study of Greek and Latin at black educational institutions.

One unexamined aspect of this dynamic of recovery concerns the use of Latin mottoes at historically black colleges and universities. Such was commonplace in schools run for whites, but what about schools for black students? Based on a sample drawn from 16 institutions, my paper will show us that there were three different types of mottoes: those based upon direct quotation from classical authors, direct quotation from religious texts or the creation of a new texts using Neo-Latin or an original translation based on an ancient text. Placing a particular focus upon three mottoes from Wilberforce University (the first belonging to the university itself and the other pair used by two university publications, the *Sodalitan* and the *Wilberforce Graduate*) I’ll suggest the reasons why these mottoes were, (and in many cases) are still used.

(328 words)