

Michele Valerie RONNICK

William Lewis Bulkley (1861-1933):  
The First African American to Earn a  
Doctorate in Latin

We classicists take pride in knowing the history of our discipline. But until recently divisions of segregation within the academy have kept us from seeing across the color line (Ronnick, *The Works of William Sanders Scarborough: Black Classicist and Race Leader*, Oxford University Press, 2006). Because we already know that Richard T. Greener (1844-1922) was the first black to join the American Philological Association (Pohlman, *African American Political Thought*, Taylor & Francis 2003, p. xxxviii), we should also be pleased to ascertain and learn a bit about the first black person to earn a doctorate in Latin in the U.S. This was William Lewis Bulkley whose name has not been mentioned in the publications or at the meetings of the American Philological Association since the years of his membership during the nineteenth century.

Bulkley was born March 23, 1861 in Greenville, South Carolina. He was one of the first students to graduate from Claflin University, which is the oldest historically black college or university in the state of South Carolina. His father Rev. Vincent Henry Bulkley, a Methodist clergyman, was one of the school's founders. Soon after his graduation in 1882, the young Bulkley began to teach Greek, Latin and German at his alma mater. He served as professor from 1886-1899, university secretary in 1895 and as vice president from 1896-1899. In 1893 he became the first person of African descent to earn a Ph.D. at Syracuse University. His subject was Latin. With this degree Dr. Bulkley became the first person of African descent to earn a doctorate in Latin in the U.S.

Using documents gathered from Claflin, Syracuse, Haverford, Fisk, Wilberforce and other sources this paper will present the details of Bulkley's life, give descriptions of Latin courses at Claflin, describe Dr. Bulkley's pedagogical approach to the study of Latin and his 6 year membership in the American Philological Association. Mention will be also made of Lewis Baxter Moore (1866-1928) who was the first black man in the U.S. to earn a doctorate in Greek with a dissertation on Sophocles from the University of Pennsylvania in 1896. Dr. Moore was also a member of the American Philological Association.