

Dr. Sylvia Washington Ba

Class of 1958, Professor Emerita

Pioneer women in each Trinity era raised and strengthened the foundations on which we stand today. Sylvia Washington Ba is such a pioneer Trinity Woman, a trailblazer whose intellectual and personal achievements inspire each new generation of Trinity students and faculty.

Arriving at Trinity in Fall 1954 after graduating in the last segregated class at Dunbar High School, Sylvia Washington found herself among the very few first African American students breaking barriers at Trinity. With her customary elegance and excellence, she set about demonstrating her intellectual prowess in French Literature, graduating *magna cum laude* in 1958 with offers of both a Fulbright and a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship. She took the Fulbright for a year of study in France, and then used the Wilson to support her doctoral studies at Fordham.

Sylvia Ba returned to Trinity in 1961 to teach French, becoming the first full-time Black faculty member. While teaching at Trinity, she won an AAUW fellowship for doctoral research in Paris, completing her dissertation on the topic of the poetry of Senegalese President Leopold Senghor. The Princeton University Press published her book *The Concept of Negritude in the Poetry of Leopold Sedar Senghor* (1973). Few Americans knew the concept of “negritude” at that time, an affirmation of Black consciousness arising in the 1930’s that rebelled against the colonialism, racism and cultural assimilation imposed by the French and other white Europeans on African people and nations.

During her research, Dr. Ba interviewed President Senghor, and he was so impressed with her that he invited her to Senegal where she met and married Samba Ba.



In 1969, Mr. Ba became the press attache to the Senegalese Embassy in Washington, and Dr. Ba resumed teaching French at Trinity. That same year, their son Mbissane was born. They returned to Senegal in 1973. Dr. Ba joined the faculty at the Universite Cheikh Anta Diop de Dakar (UCAD), Senegal.

Dr. Ba never forgot Trinity, and her former students and colleagues greeted her with joy whenever she was able to visit. In recent years, she served with distinction on the Alumnae Association Board of Directors.

For her leadership and courage as a trailblazer in desegregation and change in Trinity’s racial culture, for her intellectual excellence and scholarly achievements, Trinity is pleased to bestow upon Dr. Sylvia Washington Ba the degree of Doctor of Letters, *honoris causa*.

