IN MEMORIAM
MELVIN P. SIKES

Melvin P. Sikes was born December 24, 1917, in Charleston, Missouri. In 1934, at age seventeen, he graduated from Roosevelt High School. He earned his B.A. degree in 1938 at North Carolina College. In 1939, he began his career as an educator and during the following three years served as an elementary and high school teacher as well as a part-time administrator at Bett-a-Etta Junior College. He enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1943 and was assigned to the Army Air Forces’ 477th Bombardment Group at Godman Airfield, Kentucky. During his time in the Armed Services, he rose to the rank of second lieutenant and was a member of the famous Tuskegee Airmen. After completing his military responsibilities in 1946, he pursued graduate studies in education at the University of Chicago, where he completed his Master of Arts degree in 1948 and his Doctor of Philosophy degree in 1950. After earning his doctorate, he resumed his career as an educator and served as dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at Wilberforce University from 1950 to 1952, where he was instrumental in successfully guiding the institution through the accreditation process of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. In 1952, he accepted the position of administrative dean at Bishop College in Marshall, Texas, and had a pivotal role in that college’s successful accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

He married Zeta Bledsoe in 1953 and together they raised two children, Bertha-Kimeta Sikes and Cheryl Lynn Sikes.

After serving as dean at these two historically black colleges, he decided to deepen his focus on applied psychology and completed an internship in clinical and counseling psychology at the VA Medical Center in Houston, Texas, in 1959. From 1960 to 1968, he was employed as a clinical psychologist with the Veterans Administration and from 1968 to 1969, he served as a community relations specialist for the U.S. Department of Justice.

Dr. Sikes’ career at The University of Texas at Austin began in 1969, when he was appointed professor of educational psychology in the College of Education, and spanned a fourteen-year period until his retirement in 1983. His early research efforts and related publications focused on alcoholism and the treatment of the alcoholic person, as well as the study of the impact of school and college desegregation and racism on the mental health of minority group members. During his years at The University of Texas, he broadened his investigation of the effects of racism and discrimination to include helping prepare future teachers to work in multi-cultural and multi-ethnic environments, as well as to assist teachers to cope with disruptive students. He received a training grant from the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare for the Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, a National Institute of Education grant to support his work on taking a mental health approach to dealing with disruptive students, a Hogg Foundation for Mental Health Studies grant to study how to reduce discipline and dropout problems, and a Hogg Foundation grant to support the establishment of the First National Congress of Black Professionals in Higher Education.

Over the span of his career, he received recognition and awards for his contributions to education, community race relations, and work in prevention and treatment of alcoholism. He received a Meritorious Service Award from the Veterans Administration for his Police-Community Relations program. In 1974, the Danforth Foundation selected him to participate in the Danforth Associate Program, which has as a goal the promotion of
excellence in teaching and humanizing the educational process, especially for underserved student populations. In 1978, as a result of his increasing involvement in teacher preparation, he was appointed as a part-time faculty associate at the Research and Development Center for Teacher Education. A major focus throughout his career was on improving racial relations in the community, on campus, and in classrooms, as well as helping people understand the experience of being a minority. His tireless efforts to achieve this goal led to bestowal of the Texas Hero Award by the Texas NAACP for his work in integration, civil rights, and promotion of racial harmony. In recognition of his efforts, he was also appointed to the governor’s Human Relations Division and the Texas Children’s Commission. To better prepare teachers for the changing demographics in the classroom and promote racial harmony, he developed a new course: Teaching in Multi-Cultural/Multi-Ethnic Schools.

Perhaps one of his greatest achievements was his attunement to the needs of his students and encouragement of them to be successful. He was highly respected by students and appreciated by his colleagues for his unique contributions to teacher education and racial harmony. He ceaselessly served on important governmental commissions, University and college committees, and task forces, in addition to his research duties and classroom responsibilities. Clearly The University of Texas, the College of Education, and the Department of Educational Psychology are grateful for his dedicated service and willingness to go the extra mile to make the University a friendly and welcoming place for all.

This memorial resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Cindy Carlson (chair), David Drum, and Gary Borich.

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