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FANNIE HICKLIN

1918-2019
City: Madison, Whitewater
County: Dane, Walworth, Jefferson

Fannie Hicklin, a well-respected speech and theatre professor, was the first African-American faculty member at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater.

Fannie Frazier was born on July 21, 1918, in Talladega, Alabama. She grew up on the Talladega College Campus where her father was a professor. Talladega was a segregated town, but Frazier attended an integrated primary school with Black and white teachers. In second grade, she developed an interest in theater; she and her friends wrote their own plays and performed them for teachers and parents, because all the movie theaters in town were white-only.

In 1939, Frazier earned her bachelor's degree from Talladega College. She then taught at high schools around the South. She married Leon Hicklin in 1944, and they had a daughter, Ariel, in 1946. During this time, she went back to school at the University of Michigan and received a master's degree in speech. She then taught at various colleges, including the Tuskegee Institute and Alabama A&M University. The couple divorced in 1953. In 1961, Hicklin left Alabama A&M to move to Madison, Wisconsin, and pursue a PhD in speech at the university. Due to racism, she had a difficult time finding housing in the city.

While helping Ariel enroll at Wisconsin State University-Whitewater (now UW-Whitewater), she met the president of the university and the chair of the Speech Department. They were interested in her work and told her to let them know when she had finished her degree. Because of this connection, when she finished her dissertation in 1965, *The American Negro Playwright, 1920-1964*, she already had secured a faculty role. In doing so, Hicklin became the first African American professor at Whitewater.

Hicklin taught speech and theatre courses and directed more than 50 theatrical productions. When the College of Arts and Communication was established, she helped guide its development as a member of the Dean's Advisory Board for the College. At times, she also took on additional roles as the school's Director of Affirmative Action, the Chair of the Department of Theatre/Dance, and from 1987 to 1988, Hicklin was the first Associate Dean of Faculties. In 1970, she received the W.P. Roseman Excellence in Teaching award, the institution's highest teaching honor. Hicklin taught at UW-Whitewater until 1988, for a total of 24 years. In 1996, a performance theater on campus was renamed in her honor: the Hicklin Studio Theater.

In 1977, Hicklin joined the State Historical Society of Wisconsin Board of Curators, a group responsible for leading the Wisconsin Historical Society. She continued to serve on the board after retiring. In 1991, she was elected 1st Vice President of the board, and in 1993 she became their first African American president. During her retirement in Madison, she volunteered at Olbrich Botanical Gardens. She also enjoyed travelling and took trips to Vietnam and Romania. In 2018, she received the Loraine R. Green Service Award from the sorority Alpha Kappa Alpha, which she had been a member of for over 75 years.

Hicklin died at age 101 on October 18, 2019.

To learn more, visit womeninwisconsin.org/profile/fannie-hicklin

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