



- [Home](#)
- [From the Dean](#)
- [Top Stories](#)
- [College News](#)
- [Development](#)
- [News Shorts](#)
- [Outreach Memphis](#)
- [Profiles in Excellence](#)
- [Financial Support](#)
- [Feedback](#)

Federal earmark of \$500K bolsters Hooks Institute programs

Coming off two years that brought nearly \$2 million from the federal government to launch the U of M's Benjamin L. Hooks Institute for Social Change, the Institute worked hard to show it deserved those generous gifts. The Congress must have liked what it saw: it awarded the Institute still another half million dollars in the 2004 fiscal year budget passed January 22, 2004.

According to Institute director, Dr. Doug Imig, "This award is a testimony to the importance of Dr. Hooks's lifetime of work on behalf of a more just society. We at the Institute are proud to be the stewards of this facet of his legacy."

Throughout the summer and fall of 2003, the Institute began launching the programs that the earlier earmarks made possible. Last July, the Institute sponsored a policy roundtable on the future of civil rights in the United States. The roundtable offered an opportunity for public policy researchers, civil rights activists, and community leaders here in the Mid-South to share their ideas and concerns with Senate Majority Leader, Dr. Bill Frist. "This gathering was particularly interesting both in the range of voices brought together, and in the 'off the record' nature of the gathering," commented Imig. "This allowed for a candid and generative discussion which, I believe, will have a significant impact on public policy."

In September, with school back in session, the Institute sponsored a "best paper" competition for the University of Memphis African American Graduate Student Conference. Winners of the paper competition included: Kristopher Burrell of the City University of NY; Brian Daugherty of the College of William and Mary; and Seneca Vaughn of Bowling Green State University. The winning papers can be viewed at the Hooks Institute's website (see <http://benhooks.memphis.edu>).

Also in September, speaking before a crowd of students, faculty and community leaders, noted civil rights lawyer and author Dr. Peter Irons delivered a Hooks Lecture entitled "Jim Crow's Children: The Broken Promise of the Brown Decision." Irons had revisited the five school districts that were defendants in the Brown v. Board of Education Supreme Court decision fifty years ago, in order to assess where those districts are now in terms of racial integration, educational attainment, and social justice. Among the provocative findings that Irons reported to the audience: it took almost 20 years before the last officially segregated school closed in this country, and all five of the districts involved in the Brown case remain fundamentally segregated today.

The Institute enjoyed the fruits of one of its new initiatives last October, when it convened a research workshop featuring the recipients this past summer of the Institute's first-ever Faculty Research Awards. These awards were granted to U of M faculty to support research examining the influence of Brown v. Board of Education on public education, business practices, political mobilization and patterns of urban and suburban development. Winners of the Faculty Research Awards included: Dr. Ken Holland (now at the University of Kansas), Dr. Cynthia Bond Hopson (Department of Journalism), Dr. Kevin H. Smith (Cecil C. Humphreys School of Law), and Paul M. Wright (Department of Human Movement Science and Education). These papers may also be found on the Institute's website.

Also in October, the Institute hosted its annual "Civil Rights in the School's" outreach program, which brings hundreds of elementary and secondary school students to the university campus to discuss civil rights and civic engagement with Dr. Benjamin Hooks (see photos left). Since 1996 nearly 3,000 students from public and private schools in Memphis and Shelby County have participated in the program. With the assistance of faculty in the College of Education, this year's program introduced fifth and eleventh grade students to issues related to voting rights, equal opportunity, and the importance of civic engagement.

The Hooks Institute then combined forces with The National Institute of Law and Equity and the National Civil Rights Museum to present a December symposium on "Crime and Unjust Punishment: The Emerging Civil Rights Agenda." The daylong event at the National Civil Rights Museum featured national and area judges, prosecutors, political leaders and individuals who were exonerated because of the efforts of the Innocence Project, a nonprofit legal clinic that has identified and exonerated 130 persons through DNA evidence testing.

Over the next few months, the Institute will continue its series of events celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the Brown v. Board of Education court decision. In February, the Institute teams with the African and African American Studies Program to bring to campus Dr. Frankie Rusan Wilson, a well-known historian whose current research examines black women's history during the Jim Crow era.

Also in February, Dr. Lee Bollinger, president of Columbia University, and former president of the University of Michigan, delivered a Hooks Lecture reviewing the path from Brown to the recent rulings by the United States Supreme Court that bear his name and that have recalibrated Affirmative Action policy in this country.

Finally, in March, the Institute will host a two-day workshop on the legacy of Brown, bringing together scholars from across the country to present their research examining the ways in which that historic decision has come to shape life in this country over the past fifty years.

To find out how you can take part in the work of the Institute by becoming a founding contributor to the new Hooks Institute Endowment, please contact Deborah Hernandez, Director of Development, at (901) 678-2649, or Doug Imig, Director of the Hooks Institute, at (901) 678-2769.

[Top of Page](#)

[Home](#) | [From the Dean](#) | [College News](#) | [Development](#) | [New Faculty News Shorts](#) | [Outreach Memphis](#) | [Profiles in Excellence](#)
[Financial Support](#) | [Dean's Staff](#) | [Newsletter Staff](#) | [Feedback](#) | [Back Issues](#)

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