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Civil Rights Icon Hooks Will Inaugurate Speaker Series in U.S. Capitol and in Memphis

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A talk by the Rev. Benjamin L. Hooks at the U.S. Capitol on October 6 will inaugurate a new speaker series on Capitol Hill sponsored by the Benjamin L. Hooks Institute for Social Change at the University of Memphis. The theme of the series is *Civil Rights and Social Justice: Past, Present and Future*. During his 5 p.m. Washington, D.C., lecture, Hooks will share his insights on the profound changes in American society that flowed from the American Civil Rights Movement, while also addressing the urgency of eliminating remaining racial, economic, and other disparities in America.

This coming November 4, at 6 p.m. in the Michael D. Rose Theatre at the University of Memphis, Hooks will present the same lecture. The Memphis lecture is free and open to the public.

Rev. Benjamin L. Hooks

In 2010, on dates that will be announced later, the Hooks Institute will continue its Capitol Hill Speaker Series. Those lectures will feature University of Memphis faculty. Their lectures, like Hooks', will be repeated at the University of Memphis. The lectures are intended to stimulate discussion about disparities in a changing twenty-first century America and ways to address those disparities.

In announcing the new initiative, Hooks Institute Director Daphene R. McFerren said, "Having witnessed seminal historic moments during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Dr. Hooks first bore witness to an America that denied basic civil rights to African-Americans, then to an America that was forced to hear the voices of civil rights activists who demanded that the nation honor its highest founding principle - that all people are created equal. Those who attend this lecture will become part of a historic moment in which Hooks, a civil rights icon, will share his thoughts about the quest for racial equality and will explain how those experiences are relevant to tackling racial, economic, and other disparities that defeat individual potential."

A native of Memphis, Benjamin Hooks was born in 1925, the fifth of seven children of Robert and Bessie Hooks. He earned his undergraduate degree at LeMoyne-Owen College in Memphis, served in World War II, and later received a law degree from DePaul University in Chicago. After joining the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Hooks felt called to the ministry and was ordained a Baptist minister in 1956.

Nine years later, Tenn. Gov. Frank G. Clement appointed Hooks to fill a vacancy on the Shelby County Criminal Court. With that appointment, he became the first African-American judge in a court of record in the South. The following year he ran as a candidate for the position and won that election.

In 1972, President Richard Nixon appointed Hooks as the first African-American member of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). During his tenure, he addressed the lack of minority ownership of television and radio stations, the lack of minority employment in the broadcasting industry, and the image of blacks in the mass media.

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On November 6, 1976, Hooks was elected Executive Director of the NAACP, a position he held until 1992. In 2007, Hooks was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom - the nation's highest civil award.

In 1996, Hooks and University of Memphis officials received approval from the Tennessee Board of Regents to create the Benjamin L. Hooks Institute for Social Change at the University of Memphis. The mission of the Institute is to preserve the history of the American Civil Rights Movement and to advance the legacy of that movement through scholarship and community action. The Hooks Institute archives include Hooks' personal papers, which are housed in the Mississippi Valley Collection in the U of M's McWhorter Library.

Founded in 1912, the University of Memphis today is a comprehensive metropolitan research university that is recognized nationally and internationally for its academic, research, and athletic programs. With more than 21,000 students, the U of M offers more than 254 areas of study for those seeking Bachelor's, Master's and Doctoral degrees. It also offers the juris doctor (law) and education specialist degrees.

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