

Olympian Cullen Jones works with
Splash Mid-South swimmers.





20 YEARS AND COUNTING

by Gabrielle Maxey

Two decades in, the role of the Hooks Institute for Social Change in safeguarding civil rights has never been bigger.

The contributions of African-American men are central to the success of the Mid-South. While African-American men have, and are making, profound and significant contributions to our nation, those attending the University of Memphis have among the lowest graduation rates of all groups. "Why not solve this problem?" asks Benjamin L. Hooks Institute for Social Change director Daphene R. McFerren.

To increase academic, personal and career success among African-American men, the Hooks Institute for Social Change launched its Hooks African-American Male Initiative (HAAMI) last spring. With intense coaching and mentoring of HAAMI participants by faculty, business and community members, the Hooks Institute hopes to move the needle of academic accomplishments of this group.

"With HAAMI, they stress the importance of understanding the financials and trying to limit the use of loans, to really apply yourself so you won't have to repeat classes," says Bradley Cowan, a senior mechanical engineering major. "Also, we talk about networking and

how important that is, being able to produce an elevator pitch, selling your brand. You have the opportunity to take in from people in the professions the steps to being successful – to understand the core values to step into the professional world, to put your best foot forward."

Freshman Jason Martin has benefitted as well. "You get a lot of enlightenment from every HAAMI session that you attend," he says. "With HAAMI, they push you as a person and they make you believe in yourself more than anything."

HAAMI is just one of the initiatives of the Hooks Institute, which celebrates its 20th anniversary this year. The year-long observation will reflect on the accomplishments of the Institute's past and on creating and implementing quality programs that preserve the history of the civil rights movement and create positive, life-changing opportunities to help individuals reach their personal and career potential.

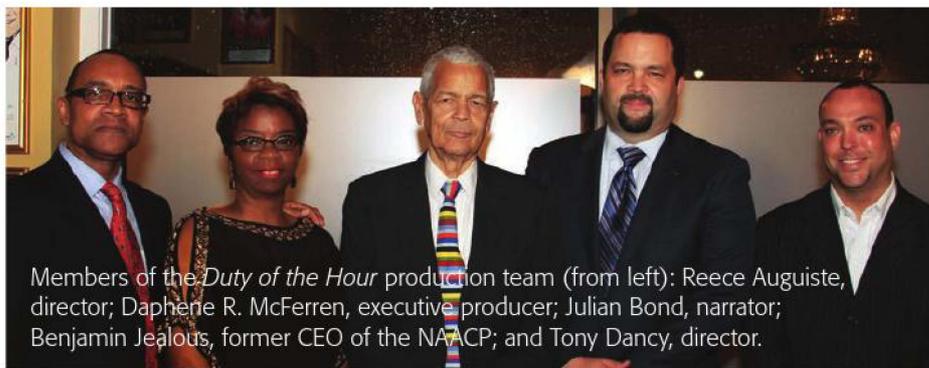
SUCCESS BREEDS SUCCESS

The idea for an institute arose from faculty members of the UofM Department of Political Science. "I had the privilege of working closely with Dr. and Mrs. (Frances Dancy) Hooks in shaping a vision for the work of the Hooks Institute," says McFerren. "Not only were they committed to the work of the Hooks Institute during their lifetimes, they also bequeathed \$273,000 to the Institute from their estate. They have left significant financial gifts to the Hooks Institute and other organizations to demonstrate the urgent need for minority groups to financially support causes beyond their personal and family needs."

Some of the greatest resources in the nation, including people, are located in the Mid-South and right here in Memphis, says McFerren. "However, it is undeniable that slavery, the Jim Crow era and the plantation economy that supported Memphis and the surrounding counties well into the 20th century discouraged implementation of aggressive educational standards for African-Americans, and even whites, and inhibited the development of jobs that are propelling growth in other cities," she says.

In crafting its programs, the Institute focuses on the past, present and future. Partnering with the RISE Foundation in Memphis, the Hooks Institute has sponsored financial literacy classes to give individuals a better understanding of money management and its impact on their futures. Joining forces with UofM student organizations in 2012, the Institute spearheaded a voter registration drive on campus that registered 285 students in six hours.

For the past eight years, the Hooks Institute has partnered with Methodist Le Bonheur



Members of the *Duty of the Hour* production team (from left): Reece Auguiste, director; Daphene R. McFerren, executive producer; Julian Bond, narrator; Benjamin Jealous, former CEO of the NAACP; and Tony Dancy, director.

Healthcare, the city of Memphis, the YMCA and Tiger Swimming to increase the number of minority children who know how to swim. African-American and Hispanic youth have the highest drowning rates in the nation. Research shows that low swimming rates are often linked to low-income levels, and that minority children and their parents often have limited access to swimming facilities. Since Splash Mid-South was created in 2009, more than 6,000 children have completed swimming lessons or water safety instruction programs. The program not only aims to save lives, but also to help foster healthier living through exercise.

The bedrock of Hooks' programming is its efforts to preserve the history of the civil rights movement. Last spring, the Institute hired archivist William Love to work with the Institute and Special Collections at the University of Memphis Libraries to digitize papers from Hooks' collection. By spring 2017, they hope to launch a website that features photographs and seminal documents highlighting the Hooks' lifetime of service to others.



Benjamin and Frances Dancy Hooks

The Institute's website already offers a treasure trove of information. The "Tent City: Stories of Civil Rights in Fayette County, Tennessee" site explores events that took place from 1959 through the early 1970s. After registering to vote, several hundred black residents were

evicted from their sharecropper houses and forced to move into tent cities set up on donated land, some living there for more than two years.

The "Mapping Civil Rights History Portal" lets visitors explore defining events and locations from the civil rights movement. By clicking on the pins on each location on the map, viewers are taken to landscapes, stories and photographs of those involved in the movement.

The Institute is a sponsor of "Critical Conversations," a series of events bringing together students, faculty, staff and the community to discuss issues of social justice and change. The series has explored such topics as the police and social justice, same-sex marriage and sexual assault on college campuses.

Another goal of the Hooks Institute is to tell the story of the civil rights movement using 21st century technology to reach diverse audiences by using multiple platforms. This spring, the Hooks Institute will launch the documentary *Duty of the Hour* on public television stations across the country. *Duty of the Hour* is the first documentary to explore the life of Hooks and his dramatic intersection with many defining historical moments in the civil rights movement. The documentary explores his journey from the segregated backstreets of south Memphis during the Great Depression, the Memphis "reign of terror" on the black community, World War II and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination, through his rise in public life. Other Hooks Institute

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productions include *The Civil Rights Movement: A Cultural Revolution*, a film that examines how the movement shaped music, fashion and culture, and *Freedom’s Front Line: Fayette County, Tennessee*, a film on the civil rights movement in that county.

A 2014 Hooks publication, “A Call for Collective Action: Tackling Social Challenges in Memphis,” addressed how economic, racial and gender disparities may prevent individuals from reaching their potential. Authored by faculty members, the publication analyzed census and other data to explain the challenges facing people, and called for cooperation among the University, business and government to help solve systemic problems.

Other Institute programs include hosting conferences, symposia, lectures and promoting local and national scholarship on civil and human rights.

“MAKE MEMPHIS GREAT THIS CENTURY”

The Benjamin L. Hooks Institute for Social Change was created in 1996 with Hooks’ donation of approximately 300 boxes of materials from his personal documents. The items span his career as a lawyer, judge, civil rights activist, the first African-American commissioner of the U.S. Federal Communications Commission and executive director of the NAACP. The Institute’s advisory board was created in 2008.

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The Institute’s mission of teaching, studying and promoting civil rights and social change is intended to further the legacy of Hooks’ public service through preservation of civil rights history and implementation of programs that have a real-world, positive impact on the community.

“Memphis has some difficult work ahead to turn its economic, educational and other sectors around, but it can be done,” says McFerren. “The Hooks Institute will put its shoulder to the wheel to create the change we want to see to make Memphis great in this century.”

In keeping with its efforts to positively influence the academic experiences of African-American male students, the Hooks Institute honored Brownsville, Tenn., native Marvin R. Ellison, CEO of JCPenney, at the Institute’s annual “Join Hands for Change” gala in April. The gala’s theme, “Empowering, Supporting and Celebrating African-American Men: Triumph through Perseverance,” highlighted the contributions of men such as Ellison, a UofM alumnus who has achieved significant personal and professional success.

“I would like to see the Institute concentrate on our youth. That’s where you’ll be able to see the greatest growth later on,” says Patricia Hooks Gray, daughter of the late Dr. and Mrs. Hooks. McFerren adds, “Splash Mid-South and HAAMI demonstrate the Hooks Institute’s commitment to planting seeds for future harvest of individual potential of the community’s youth. While many human and civil rights gains were made during the



1960s, the Hooks Institute sees this century as a new frontier with formidable challenges facing our community, nation and world. As the lifetime of civil rights activism of its namesake demonstrated, hard work, perseverance and meaningful alliances create lasting change. This is a great template from which to shape and implement the work of the Hooks Institute.”

(Like other interdisciplinary centers at the UofM, the Hooks Institute heavily relies on donor and grant dollars to fund its programs. Members of the Hooks Advisory Board help to raise funds for Hooks Institute programs to supplement grant, donor and University dollars. They also help shape and evaluate programming to help ensure that the Institute’s programs are relevant and impactful to the communities they serve. To learn more about the work of the Institute, visit memphis.edu/benhooks.)