

THE UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS

PRESS RELEASE

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U.S. CIVIL RIGHTS COMMISSION MOURNS THE DEATH OF DR. BENJAMIN HOOKS

Washington, DC – The United States Commission on Civil Rights released the following statement on the life and achievements of Dr. Benjamin Hooks, former executive director of the NAACP.

The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights mourns the death of Dr. Benjamin Hooks, who passed away today at the age of 85. Dr. Hooks rose to become one of the nation's foremost civil rights leaders, exemplifying determination throughout his career. He came from a loving family that valued education. After serving in the military in World War II, Dr. Hooks graduated from law school at DePaul University in Chicago. He returned home to Tennessee, married, and joined the fight to end racial segregation by joining Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the NAACP-sponsored restaurant sit-ins and other boycotts.

He was one of the first black lawyers in Tennessee, practicing until he joined the ministry in 1956, and thereafter becoming the first African American criminal court judge in Tennessee, and in Washington, DC, becoming the first African American appointed to the Federal Communications Commission.

In 1977 he began serving as Executive Director of the NAACP, which he led for over 15 years, increasing membership and raising funds. He received many awards throughout his life, including the Humanitarian Award from the National Conference of Christians and Jews, and the Freedom Award from the National Civil Rights Museum. The University of Memphis created the Benjamin L. Hooks Institute for Social Change, which works to advance the civil rights movement through teaching, research, and community programs. In 2007, President George W. Bush awarded him the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

The Commission extends its condolences to the family and many friends of Dr. Hooks.

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*The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights is an independent, bipartisan agency charged with monitoring federal civil rights enforcement. Members include Chairman Gerald A. Reynolds, Vice Chair Abigail Thernstrom, Commissioners Todd Gaziano, Gail Heriot, Peter N. Kirsanow, Arlan D. Melendez, Ashley L. Taylor, Jr., and Michael Yaki. Martin Dannenfels is the Staff Director. Commission meetings are open to the general public. The Commission's website is <http://www.usccr.gov>.*