

# **The Free State Foundation**

**A Free Market Think Tank For Maryland...Because Ideas Matter**

## ***Perspectives from FSF Scholars***

***April 27, 2010***

***Vol. 5, No. 12***

**The Tennessean – April 24, 2010**

### **Hooks Unselfishly Paved the Way for Others**

**by**

**Deborah Taylor Tate\***

Like thousands of Americans, I was deeply saddened by the news of Dr. Benjamin Hooks' death this past week. An icon, a hero, Presidential Medal of Freedom recipient, a change-agent, a friend: I feel blessed to have known him professionally and personally. And, knowing him also meant knowing the love of his life, Francis.

In 2006, the FCC honored Dr. Hooks and Francis for their years of public service at the FCC and beyond; from increasing minority ownership of media outlets to challenging the media to do more for diverse audiences.

The last time I saw Dr. Hooks was about two years ago, on a blustery, freezing day in Memphis. The winds were howling and I had a full day of official "DTV outreach" to the Memphis area from early morning talk radio shows to local senior citizen's centers culminating in a forum at the University of Memphis Benjamin Hooks Institute.

Throughout the day and as the weather began reporting the possibility of tornadoes, I was chagrined that there was no way my friend and FCC mentor, Dr. Hooks, would possibly be able to attend our DTV event. However, just as we were beginning to start the program, the doors blew open, literally and to my surprise, there was Dr. Hooks.

---

**The Free State Foundation  
P.O. Box 60680, Potomac, MD 20859  
info@freestatefoundation.org  
www.freestatefoundation.org**

Even seated in his motorized chair, he was larger than life. He motored through the crowd, shaking hands and clapping backs and fortunately for me, came equipped with his own portable heater that kept us both warm and dry. Although it must have taken Herculean efforts for him to get out that day, not one word of complaint crossed his lips as he began his remarks to the crowd.

As always, this gentle man took a moment to set the stage, to provide some historical perspective about broadcasting and broadcasters and the important role they have played since the inception of radio communications.

Then, our lesson grew deeper—from radio to the advent of television to today's spectrum auctions and the Internet; he wove the dazzling story of U.S. technological innovation alongside the current events of the day.

Media was unfolding and began to capture the impact as events were actually occurring. He told his own story of the importance of our freedom of the press and access to information; the critical role of the media in crucial times — times in which he was a main player upon the stage of our civil rights struggle.

I don't know how he did it, but a boring DTV demonstration became a sermon on our freedoms and the media's role in the protection of our very democracy. Yes, we did finally meander around to our DTV presentation and educating the audience regarding how to connect digital boxes to an old analog TV set. However, most of us left that day with a much deeper understanding -- far beyond the adoption of another new technology.

We walked out that day into a calmer, sunlit Memphis knowing that we had been in the presence of someone who had weathered much more than a mere tornado. Someone who had spent his entire life paving the way for others — and working to protect our most precious freedoms for all.

Thank you, Dr. Hooks, for your friendship and support of me, for the high and honorable bar you set during your tenure at the FCC and for encouraging all of us to use every moment for a higher purpose. Thank you for inspiring us; for making a difference in my life, in the life of America and throughout the world.

Let freedom ring with joy that you lived among us, and heaven sing hallelujah to welcome you home.

\* Deborah Taylor Tate is a former commissioner of the Federal Communications Commission, Distinguished Adjunct Senior Fellow at the Free State Foundation, and 2009 World Telecommunications and Information Society Day Laureate for her work regarding child online protection.