

**REMARKS OF
COMMISSIONER MICHAEL J. COPPS
TRIBUTE FOR BENJAMIN HOOKS
WASHINGTON, DC
JULY 19, 2006**

It's an honor for me to be here today and to help welcome a living legend back to one of his many homes. Benjamin Hooks changed this place while he was here—not because of who he was when he arrived—although that made history, too—but for what he did once he got here, and therein was a mighty contribution. He brought solutions to problems, yes, but just as much he brought simmering and long-neglected problems to the attention of the nation, raised its consciousness, and helped educate us all on the terrible gap between the Promise of America and, in so many sad respects, the Reality of America. He showed us, as perhaps no Commissioner ever had, that the discrimination and prejudice that continued to eat at the heart of America even so recently as the 1970s, was aided and abetted by the sorry state of unequal inopportunity that existed in our communications industries.

Commissioner Hooks, just like Lawyer Hooks, Reverend Hooks and Executive Director Hooks, fought to change that reality through his unique combination of idealism and practicality. He made a difference on so many issues that came before the FCC, for that we are grateful, and today we express our gratitude and pay him long overdue tribute. As a member of the FCC, he addressed the lack of minority ownership of television and radio stations. He brought focus and attention to how African Americans are represented in the media. And with his presence he provided more stakeholders with access to the work of the FCC. He understood as Americans we all have a stake in communications policy and that it is a vital part of our job to provide more citizens with access to the Commission's policy table. But we also owe him thanks for his summons to us to do more—so much more—than we had ever done before.

Like democracy itself, equal opportunity has to be fought for by every generation. When it comes to a level field among the races, attaining equality of opportunity has proven even more difficult—even more evasive—than preserving the basic pillars of our democratic political institutions. In communications, even while some strive mightily to expand opportunity, and even while we recognize that we have come a long way since the prophets of civil and economic rights bled and died to show us the way 50 years ago, we have, I believe, basically failed the course.

Today people of color comprise more than 30% of America's population. Yet our own FCC data reveal that only 3.41% of all broadcast entities are minority-owned—and only 1.4% of TV stations. Dig a little deeper in the data and you will find that the percentage of high-power television stations owned by African-Americans is...0.12%! That's not a national problem. It's a national disgrace. And we wonder why the depiction and characterization of minorities in our media are so distorted? We wonder why issues of importance to our many diversity communities don't get the attention they need if they're ever going to be resolved? Let's be frank: ownership rules. Unless and

until we do something targeted specifically to correct this sad state of affairs, our communications sectors will continue to under-serve America and the Promise of America that I mentioned earlier will have no hope—no hope at all—of redemption.

Seeing Benjamin Hooks here today—seeing Frances, his equally remarkable wife of 54 years here with him—and recognizing the signal and significant contributions they have made to building opportunity in this land, gives us occasion to rejoice and be thankful. But Benjamin Hooks never rested on the laurels of accomplishment because he always knew how much remained to be accomplished. So we honor these two splendid Americans best by going out, upon the conclusion of this fine ceremony, and tackling the issues of inopportunity and injustice that continue to shackle not just some of our citizens but, really, all of us, no matter who we are, where we live, what we do. We best honor these fine people by taking up their struggle and trying to match the strides they made through the years. Thank you, Commissioner Hooks, for doing so much—and thank you, too, for reminding us of how much we have yet to do.