



# 2006 Margaret Brent Awards Constance Slaughter-Harvey

**Constance Slaughter-Harvey** was born in Jackson, Mississippi, one of six girls. Her parents, both educators, instilled in them the importance of being independent, that race was no barrier, and that their worth was determined by the contributions they made to others.

In 1963, Ms. Slaughter-Harvey enrolled in Tougaloo College. There she met civil rights leader Medgar Evers shortly before he was assassinated. His brutal death inspired her to get involved in the civil rights movement and help bring about changes in Mississippi. After graduating *cum laude* from Tougaloo College with a degree in Political Science and Economics, Ms. Slaughter-Harvey continued her fight for social equality while attending law school at the University of Mississippi and persevered to become the first African-American woman to receive a law degree from that institution in 1970.

Following graduation from law school, she worked for the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law for two years as a staff attorney, where she represented the families of two students who were killed at Jackson State and other students who were brutalized by highway patrolmen. She filed a desegregation lawsuit against the highway patrol, which resulted in the hiring of African-American highway patrolmen. She then returned to Forest, Mississippi to establish her private law practice.

Ms. Slaughter-Harvey became executive director of Southern Legal Rights and later, the director of East Mississippi Legal Services. In 1980, she joined Governor William Winter's staff as Director of Human Development and four years after served as Assistant Secretary of State for Elections and Public Lands with Secretary Dick Molpus. Together, she and Molpus lobbied for Mail-In Voter Registration, which was signed into law April 1991. She further led the fight for Motor Voter Registration and became the first African-American and first woman member of the Motor Voter National Advisory Board.

In 1995, Ms. Slaughter-Harvey became the coordinator

of the Mississippi State Democratic Party Coordinating Campaign and coordinated campaigns for all Democratic statewide candidates. She served as adjunct professor at Tougaloo College from 1970-2005.

Ms. Slaughter-Harvey's dedication to civil rights did not end with the struggles of the '60s and '70s. In a state that ranks 50th among the states in the percent of children who are poor, Ms. Slaughter-Harvey continues to direct her personal and professional efforts to assisting minority and poor youth through the Slaughter Memorial Foundation. As its president, she supervises an after-school tutorial/enhancement program where she spends her free time teaching and mentoring children at risk.

A few of her many honors include the National Council of Negro Women Outstanding Service Award (1987 & 1993), two NAACP Legal Awards (1990 & 1999), the Mississippi Women Lawyers' Outstanding Woman Lawyer Award (2000), and the Mississippi Bar's Susie Blue Buchanan Award (2004) for her dedication and commitment to the continuing struggle for justice. Twenty-eight years after overcoming numerous adversities at the University of Mississippi, Ms. Slaughter-Harvey received the honor of having the University's Black Law Students Association named in her respect, and in 2001 she received the law school's Public Service Award. Ms. Slaughter-Harvey was elected president of the Magnolia Bar Association, was the first African-American to serve as judge in Mississippi, and was the first African-American and woman elected president of the National Association of Election Directors. She founded the East Mississippi Legal Services and served as vice chair of the Mississippi Supreme Court Gender Fairness Task Force.

From her contributions to the law to her contributions to the community, Ms. Slaughter-Harvey fights for all humanity—protecting the interests of not only African-Americans, but also all the underprivileged and down trodden.