

## "THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT IS NOT OVER"

JUNE 2006

The Massachusetts Chapter of NAHSE (National Association of Health Service Executives) sponsored a dynamic conference on "Building and Sustaining Diversity in Healthcare Organizations." The conference was held at Simmons College in Boston on April 28, 2006. Doctor Joan Y. Reede, the keynote speaker challenged and chided the audience: "Many in this room believe that the Civil Rights Movement was a point in history, a historical event that took place and is now finished. Let me assure you that the Civil Rights Movement is nowhere near complete and far from over. We have a long, long way to go and much to do."

Joan Y. Reede MD, MPH, MS is the Dean for Diversity and Community Partnership at Harvard Medical School and Director of the Minority Faculty Development Program. She is responsible for the development and management of a comprehensive program that provides leadership, guidance and support to promote the increased recruitment, retention and advancement of underrepresented minority faculty at Harvard Medical School.

Civil rights are the rights that a nation's inhabitants have by law. Civil rights are broader than political rights and, unlike natural rights, civil rights have a legal as well as a philosophical basis. Here in the United States civil rights are usually thought of in terms of the specific rights guaranteed in the Constitution: freedom of religion, of speech, and of the press, and the rights to due process of law and to equal protection under the law.

I'm grateful for Doctor Reede's powerful admonition at Simmons College that beautiful April morning. I followed her as a panel participant and as a result of her remarks I changed my talk to a description of some personal experiences during the 60's. I promised myself that I would chronicle a civil rights moment or two in this newsletter every month from now on.

Only fifty years ago, in August 1955, 14 year old Emmett Till said, "Hey, baby" to a white woman in Money, Mississippi. Till, an African American from Chicago, was unaware of "Jim Crow" customs in the South. Four days later the woman's husband and his half-brother tortured and murdered Till. "An all white jury let the killers walk free after deliberating for just 65 minutes. They would have finished sooner, said a juror, but they took time out for a soda pop break." (Civil Rights Chronicle, [www.powells.com/biblio?isbn0785349243](http://www.powells.com/biblio?isbn0785349243))

June 2006 (50+ years later): Response of a corporate senior HR executive when asked about the importance of diversity at the company: "Not even on the table. If possible, white sheets would be the uniform of the day."