Alum Awarded Congressional Gold Medal
Edward Brooke’s legacy of equal rights lauded

“You’ve Got to get together. We have no alternative. It’s time for politics to be put aside on the back burner.”

The words of Edward W. Brooke III (LAW’48,’50, Hon.’68), spoken during his acceptance of the Congressional Gold Medal in October, reflect the former senator’s spirit and legacy as a bipartisan pioneer during a time of national unrest.

The first black member — and only black Republican — elected to the U.S. Senate by popular vote, Brooke represented Massachusetts from 1967 to 1979. During his tenure, Brooke fought for equal opportunity in education, voting, employment, health services, and affordable housing. In 1969, he organized a coalition of Democrats, Republicans, and the NAACP to defeat the Supreme Court confirmation of a Nixon nominee accused of repeatedly ruling in favor of segregation.

President Barack Obama, in presenting the medal to Brooke, said, “Today’s honor bears a unique significance: bestowed by this body of which he was an esteemed member; presented in this place where he moved the arc of history; surrounded by so many, myself included, who have followed the trail that he blazed.”

The Congressional Gold Medal, the highest civilian honor bestowed by the nation’s legislative branch, has been awarded only 150 times since 1776, when the Second Continental Congress presented it to its first recipient, George Washington. Other winners include Thomas A. Edison, the fourteenth Dalai Lama, and Elie Wiesel (Hon. ’74), BU’s Andrew W. Mellon Professor in the Humanities and winner of the 1986 Nobel Peace Prize.

In 2004 Brooke was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Kelly Cunningham

Robert B. Parker Dies
Robert Parker wrote without notes, without outlines, without even a story line in his head. He would start each book, he told Bostonia in 2005, with an opening premise, hoping it would lead to chapter two and hoping chapter two would lead to chapter three. Inevitably it did, and over thirty-seven years, it led to sixty-five books.

Parker (GRS’57,’71), who had donated his papers and drafts to BU’s Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center, died of a heart attack on January 19, 2010, while sitting at his writing desk in his Cambridge, Massachusetts, home. He was seventy-seven.

Parker pounded out thirty-seven witty and eloquent adventures of his most popular creation: Spenser, the private eye who became the central character of the TV show Spenser: For Hire. His character Jesse Stone was the protagonist in nine books and a series of TV movies.

Robert Parker earned a master’s degree and a Ph.D. in English literature at BU. His doctoral thesis, which he wrote in about two weeks, is in the collection at Mugar Memorial Library.