

## The Dream Not Forgotten: Young Lawyers March on Birmingham

By Edward L. Wright, Jr.

America in the 1950s and 1960s was facing a turbulent time. The state of the country was a far cry from the equality of man envisioned by the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. Discrimination was rampant, both overtly and covertly. Young charismatic leaders like Thurgood Marshall and Martin Luther King, Jr., pressed for racial equality and became compelling powers in their respective areas.

In 1963, Dr. King brought attention to Birmingham, Alabama, by organizing nonviolent marches and protests with teenagers and children. These marches became infamous when local officials attacked these teenagers and children by spraying them with water cannons and threatening them with vicious police dogs in and around Kelly Ingram Park. Negative publicity displayed around the world and a breakdown of business activity compelled Birmingham's Caucasian leaders to agree to some anti-segregation demands. It is this inspirational activism and the leadership of these teenagers and children that the American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division's (ABA YLD) public service project, *They Had a Dream Too: Young Leaders of the Civil Rights Movement*, highlights as a way to tap into in today's youth.

### Young Lawyers March for Young Leaders

On October 23, 2009, more than 200 young lawyers from across the United States celebrated the rollout of the ABA YLD's public service program. The project is designed to educate eleventh and twelfth grade students about the civil rights struggles that have occurred since the 1950s and to inspire them to become future leaders.

The program rollout was perhaps one of the most moving experiences of the ABA YLD Fall Conference. As they sat at tables placed on the very same soil where scenes occurred that shook the United States and forever engraved themselves on the heart of Birmingham, the crowd fell utterly silent. Panelists vividly described how they had been forever changed as a result of their experiences past and present with the violent segregationist past of Birmingham.

Outside the tent stood reminders of the struggles of 1963. The statues of children and teenagers who stood up for what they believed in, children and teenagers who moved a world through their inspiring actions, children and teenagers who knew they would be placed in jail, suffer the pain of ridicule, be sprayed with powerful water cannons, and attacked by dogs, stood up for what they knew was right. They had a dream too!

### The Dream Is Not Forgotten

The rollout of the ABA YLD public service program is evident proof that the dream is not forgotten. Forty-six years in the making, it is up to each and every young lawyer to accept the challenge and participate in forging this extraordinary program with the young men and women in their community by inspiring them to be leaders. As we celebrate the accomplishment of the program rollout, we should be excited to know this is not the end, it's the beginning. Just as generations of Americans have been positively impacted by the transformations that have occurred as a result of young inspiring leaders we too should look forward to next year and years to come as we inspire future world leaders through *They Had A Dream Too*.

*Each time someone stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope.*

—Robert F. Kennedy.

What will you do?

For more information about *They Had a Dream Too* visit, [www.abanet.org/yld/thadt](http://www.abanet.org/yld/thadt).

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