

American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division  
*The Affiliate*

## ***They Had a Dream Too: Young Leaders of the Civil Rights Movement Inspire Tomorrow's Young Leaders***

*By Michele Hyndman*

They had a dream too!

Introducing today's high school students to the role young people played in the Civil Rights Movement is the goal of the year-long [\*They Had a Dream Too: Young Leaders of the Civil Rights Movement\*](#) (*THADT*), the Young Lawyers Division's 2009–2010 Public Service Project. *THADT* has been and continues to be a great success!

Throughout the year, your fellow ABA YLD members have been working steadfastly to implement *THADT* in high schools around the country. The concept of *THADT* originated from the civil right movement that involved young leaders who changed the world during the 1950s and 1960s by making political statements for equality for all before the law. This year's service project, inspired by these young leaders of the past, was designed to motivate and develop young leaders of the future. Based on the positive feedback received over the year, *THADT* has inspired students around the country to work together to make a better future for themselves.

As part of the *THADT*, Kelly-Ann Clarke, Chair of the ABA YLD, and Christina Vassiliou Harvey, member of the ABA YLD Public Service Project Team, implemented *THADT* programs at various schools over the past year. Kelly-Ann and Christina wanted to share their awe-inspiring experiences with all of us.

### **Wells Community Academy High School**

Among the many programs Kelly-Ann implemented around the country, she visited Chicago's Wells Community Academy High School ("Wells") on January 19, 2010. Wells sits in the heart of the City of Chicago. The program included a presentation by Kelly-Ann and other ABA YLD members, a film presentation, and a discussion session—all typical components of the public service project.

Kelly-Ann spoke to the students at Wells about the role young people played in the 1950s and 1960s, and then they watched the film—*They Had a Dream Too*—that told the stories of young leaders of the Civil Rights Movement. Julian Bond, Chair of the NAACP, narrates the film, which features interviews with individuals who participated in the historic events of the Civil Rights Movement. It begins with the Little Rock Nine and covers the movement's major marches, freedom rides, and boycotts. Following the film, the students had a chance to discuss their reactions and to compare the challenges faced by students in the 1950s and 1960s with those faced by students today.

By way of background, many students that attend Wells do not believe they have the option to excel and be successful in their urban environment. Within the school's walls are metal detectors, scanners, and cameras at every turn to protect the students and to enforce school rules. According to the school's unofficial statistics, 50% of its female students are or have been pregnant. Fortunately, through *THADT*, Kelly-Ann and other lawyers had the opportunity to spend time with some of Wells' students to discuss the many options that are available to them to have a great future.

Kelly-Ann reported that when the film was shown, the students received the message well. "Although some students were unruly and chatted during the film, many of those chatting were discussing what was happening in the film! They reacted to some of the harsher parts of the film with gasps and astonishment and made comments about what they would do if someone did that to them."

Simone, a disabled sophomore, approached Kelly-Ann after the film and inquired about the length of time required to become a lawyer. After their conversation, Simone decided that the time invested to become a lawyer was worth it to her and responded to Kelly-Ann by saying, "I don't want to be a number. I want to be someone. I want to come back here as a lawyer and show them that you can be someone coming from here."

Kelly-Ann reports: "Simone was an example of why we need to do more with *They Had a Dream Too* and any other project through which we reach into schools and talk to students. We can make a difference and show 50% of the girls at Wells that there are other options."

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In October 2009, when the ABA YLD launched *THADT* in Birmingham, Alabama, Kelly-Ann asked young people to imagine what they can do, pointing out that even with their lack of technology young people of the Civil Rights Movement changed the law and changed the nation.

### **Evans High School**

The ABA YLD also presented *THADT* at Evans High School in Orlando, Florida, during the Midyear Meeting. On February 4, 2010, about seven ABA YLD members participated in the project, including Kelly-Ann, Christine Harvey, Keathan Frink, Kara Nyquist, Amy Meynig, Min Cho, and Angela Scott, an attorney who specializes in discrimination law.

Christine Harvey reports that in planning for the event, she reached out to Melanie Griffin of the Orlando Host Committee. Griffin recommended a great class that consisted of students who are considered “at risk” youth at Evans High School. The class teacher, Jennifer Bohn, typically provides the students with a nontraditional format to involve them in their communities as a way for them to better themselves.

The ABA YLD group presented the *THADT* film to Bohn’s class. Following the film, the attorneys discussed the importance of diversity in the law and explained how civil rights attorneys are still working to bring about social change. In addition, they discussed activism and how the students can get involved.

Harvey reports that the students were able to relate to the students in the film and shared their own experiences effecting social change in their community regarding their high school. When Evans High School was to be relocated and re-built, the students organized themselves, wrote letters to the School Board, and attended meetings to ensure that their input was considered. The students were very involved in the project because the location of the high school affected their safety on campus and in their community. The students of Evans High School should be commended for their efforts and for being activists in their community.

The students also shared information about their current activist efforts regarding a homelessness project; they have developed a video addressing the homelessness problem in their community and throughout the City of Orlando.

Harvey also reports that the students enjoyed the presentation immensely, and many came up to the speakers after class and asked how they could become lawyers.

*THADT* is and has been an excellent turn-key project for any bar association to take to a school, community center, church, or after school program. Every student has a struggle and can identify with the students in the film. No matter where I show the film—Chicago, Orlando, Austin, or Waco—one reaction stays the same. The students learn something they didn’t know and enjoy learning in a different format. Simply, it works.

—Kelly-Ann Clarke, Chair of the ABA YLD.

*Michele Hyndman is an Associate Editor of The Affiliate and a Tax Attorney at Marjorie Roberts PC in St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands.*