

Breylin Friend

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sixth grade

The year is 1963, and racial tension is at an all-time high. John F. Kennedy is the president, and Lyndon B. Johnson is the vice president.

*The afternoon of May 2, 1963, we skipped class and jumped out of our classroom windows. We met at the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama. As the clock ticked closer and closer to 12 in the afternoon, my heart began to race fast, very fast, and my palms felt soggy, like a wet sponge. We were instructed to march in twos toward City Hall and the downtown business district. We were greeted by police officers, nightsticks, and some high-powered water that caught me off guard. Firefighters were spraying kids with water hoses as we huddled together and kept low. While marching, I read damaged cardboard signs that read, "CAN A MAN LOVE GOD and HATE HIS BROTHER?" We continued to march until Bull Connor's police force escorted us by school buses to the county jails and juvenile detention facilities.*

*The march lasted for eight days, eight long days of protest. More and more children poured into the streets daily. Television and newspaper images of children being attacked would be seen and studied for years by children who look and feel the same way I do. Children who want freedom, liberty, and justice for all. Six days later, on May 8th, a temporary truce was called, and by May 10th, an agreement was reached by the government and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.*

In May 1963, more than 1,000 Black students, some as young as elementary age, marched in Birmingham, Alabama, to protest unfair segregation laws: this event is called the Children's March or Children's Crusade. This march was necessary; Black leaders tried their hardest to end segregation and fight for freedom through mass meetings, lunch counter sit-ins, nonviolent marches through the streets, and boycotts of segregated stores during the shopping season, all simply for freedom in the southern

states. This march was one of the main events that led to the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which outlawed legal segregation in public places and banned many kinds of discrimination.

Martin Luther King Jr. wrote a letter from Birmingham jail: "Include more children and teenagers in the civil rights movement". Children did not have the same consequences as adults, like jail time, unemployment, and even losing their own families. Adding children to the march would increase the number of participants, and this would show the government that they wanted and deserved the same rights as the people in the white race.

The march demonstrated that young people's voices matter and that kids can be brave leaders for fairness and equality, a lesson that inspires today's youth-led protests for racial justice and human rights. Remembering the Children's March helps today's society keep working against racism and reminds students that standing up peacefully for what is right can change the country.

My name is Breylin Friend. I am an African American, 6th-grade student attending St Mary's School in Wooster, Ohio. I saw myself while studying the Great Children's Crusade and thought it was only right to relive the story in a first-person point of view. I am honored by the courage and strength these children portrayed not only during the march but also at this time of segregation. Children can make a difference; we all can make a difference.