

ABOUT WILEY A. BRANTON

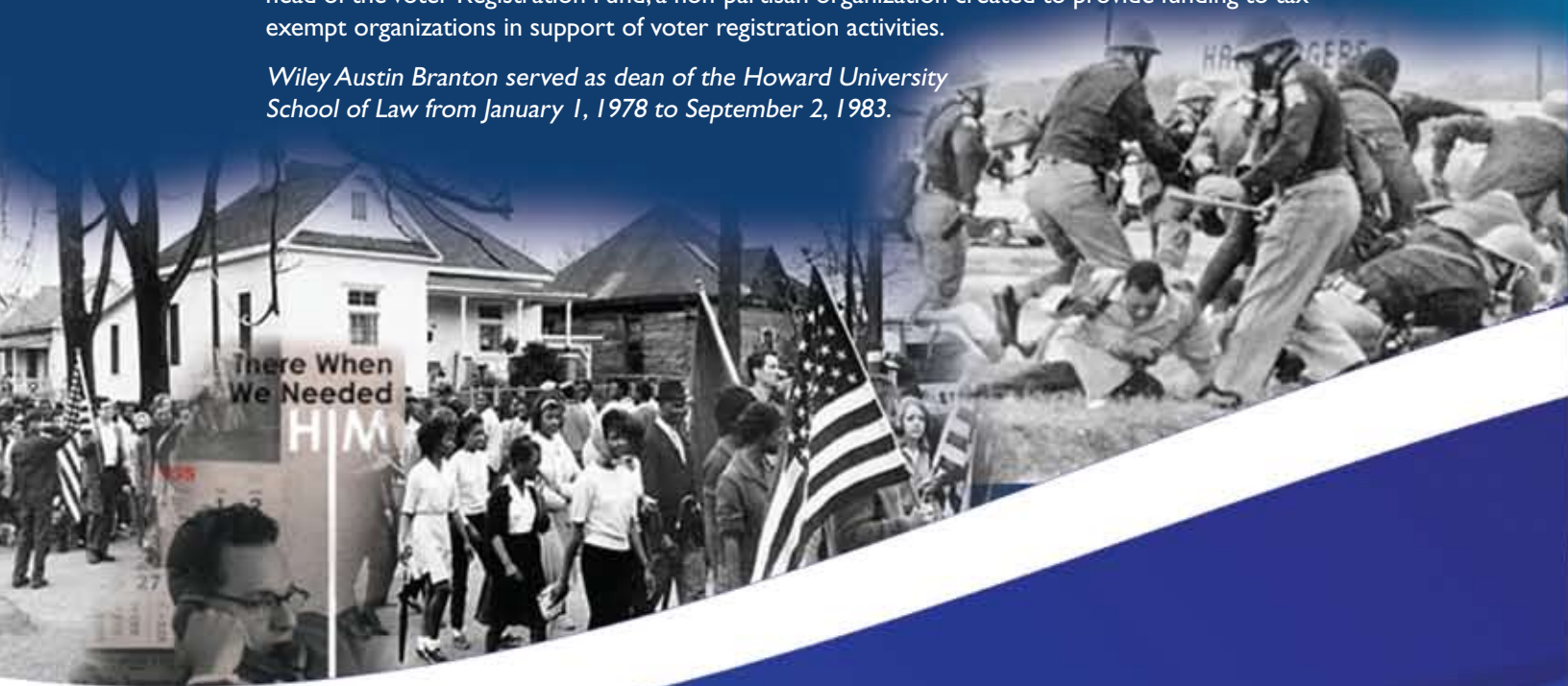
A prominent attorney and noted civil rights activist, Wiley Austin Branton was a strong advocate of voting rights for all Americans. Born in Pine Bluff, Arkansas on December 13, 1923, he received his elementary, junior high, and high school education in Pine Bluff schools. An Army veteran of World War II, Branton spent time during the post-war period teaching blacks how to mark an election ballot. His efforts resulted in his being convicted of a misdemeanor for "teaching the mechanics of voting."

Branton attended Arkansas A.M. & N. College (now the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff) where he received the Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration in 1950. He received his law degree in 1952 from the University of Arkansas School of Law at Fayetteville.

Branton achieved national prominence when he served as the chief counsel for the Black plaintiffs in the 1957 Little Rock Desegregation Case. However, during his long distinguished legal career, he made significant contributions in the voting rights arena as both a public officer and private citizen. In 1962, the major American civil rights leaders, which included Roy Wilkins, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Whitney Young, Jr., unanimously approved the selection of Branton as the first executive director of the Southern Regional Council's Voter Education Project, based in Atlanta, Georgia. The Project was a cooperative effort that successfully registered over 600,000 Black voters in eleven states and helped create the momentum for the 1965 Voting Rights Act.

In 1965, Branton moved to Washington where he was appointed by Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey as the executive secretary to President Lyndon B. Johnson's Council on Equal Opportunity. As a chief aide to Humphrey and Johnson, Branton traveled throughout the South encouraging Blacks to register under the 1965 Voting Rights Act. From 1972 to 1974, Branton served as the head of the Voter Registration Fund, a non-partisan organization created to provide funding to tax exempt organizations in support of voter registration activities.

Wiley Austin Branton served as dean of the Howard University School of Law from January 1, 1978 to September 2, 1983.



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SIXTH ANNUAL
Wiley A. Branton/ *Howard Law Journal*
Symposium

From Reconstruction to the White House: The Past and Future of Black Lawyers in America

Friday, October 23, 2009
Howard University School of Law
Moot Court Room
Washington, DC



October 23, 2009

Dear Friends,

Welcome to the Howard University School of Law at a momentous time in our history: the celebration of the Law School's 140th anniversary. In 1867, Congress chartered Howard University, responding to the needs of black Americans who obtained newfound rights as a result of the Civil War and the Reconstruction Amendments to the Constitution. Two years later, the Howard University Law Department opened with six dedicated students and several pioneering part-time faculty members, all of whom sought to protect those hard-fought for rights. The Law School's roots in Reconstruction and our country's recent Presidential election inspired this year's Wiley A. Branton-Howard Law Journal Symposium: *From Reconstruction to the White House: The Past and Future of Black Lawyers in America*.

Today's Symposium honors not only our President, Barack Obama, but also all the lawyers who came before him and those that will follow him. The Law School's first dean, John Mercer Langston, helped secure black suffrage and was one of the first black Americans ever elected to the House of Representatives, blazing the trail that President Obama would later follow. Dean Langston was not the first Howardite to create a lasting legacy; luminaries such as Charles Hamilton Houston, Thurgood Marshall, Pauli Murray, and Wiley A. Branton were all to follow. These great lawyers represent the past of black lawyers, a past that inspires our alumni and current students, who represent the future.

With the generous support of Sidley Austin LLP, we are able to honor the legacy that Wiley A. Branton helped to establish. We are also honored to celebrate the inaugural presentation of the J. Clay Smith, Jr. Award, presented this year to our keynote speaker, David B. Wilkins. Professor Wilkins enthusiastically provided invaluable assistance in assembling an outstanding slate of panelists to examine both the roots of and prospects for black lawyers. We are honored to have practitioners, academics, and jurists here today who will reflect upon their experiences as well as the journeys that lie ahead.

On behalf of both the Howard University School of Law and the *Howard Law Journal*, we thank you for attending and celebrating this exciting time with us. We especially want to thank Sidley Austin LLP for their generous support over the past six years. We are confident that you will benefit from the discussions today, which will be published in the Spring 2010 issue of the *Howard Law Journal*.

Sincerely,

X. Blake Sparrow
Editor-in-Chief
Howard Law Journal

Caren E. Short
Co-Chair, Wiley A. Branton-Howard Law Journal Symposium Committee
Executive Solicitations & Submissions Editor
Howard Law Journal

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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