

Energized: The faces of the young people

by [John Buchanan](#) in the [December 2, 2008](#) issue

Whatever else you might think about the outcome of the election, Barack Obama energized young adults in a way that was reminiscent of John F. Kennedy's campaign.

As I watched the election returns and the wonderfully diverse crowd that gathered in Chicago's Grant Park to celebrate Obama's victory, I remembered my own first exposure to the civil rights movement and how the connection between Christian faith and the quest for racial justice caught my imagination and solidified my sense of call to ministry.

I remembered hearing a young guest preacher from Atlanta by the name of Martin Luther King Jr. in Rockefeller Chapel at the University of Chicago. I remembered Andrew Young visiting the school and telling us that some ministers needed to get involved in demonstrations and marches in the South—and that the rest needed to stay home to explain what was happening to their white congregations.

I remembered marching in downtown Lafayette, Indiana, after Martin Luther King was assassinated and signing a petition advocating the formation of a human rights commission—and getting in hot water with some of my congregation when I wrote a letter to the commission, published in the local newspaper, asking the city to remove a black-faced post boy standing by a hitching post in front of a prominent fire station.

As the votes were tallied and Obama's victory became evident, television cameras showed the reaction of crowds of Republican and Democratic supporters. There was sadness on the losing side, but not much anger that I could see. In conceding the election, John McCain could not have been more gracious and honorable as he pledged his support for the new president. It was a time to be grateful for a country practiced in the peaceful transfer of power.

In the end, though, it was the faces of the young people that stayed with me. I thought of Thomas Friedman's comment in his book *Hot, Flat and Crowded*: "Our young people are so much more idealistic than we deserve them to be, . . . still eager to be enlisted—to fix education, research renewable energy, repair our infrastructure, help others. They want our country to matter again, they want to be summoned . . . to some great project worthy of America . . . to nation-building not just in Iraq and Afghanistan, but nation-building in America."