



Denny's and civil rights attorney Ben Crump empower future lawyers and dreamers

Iconic investment at St. Thomas University's Ben Crump College of Law is meant to inspire minority students to achieve their dreams



BY MUNSON STEED
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In a groundbreaking collaboration, Denny's and Civil Rights Attorney Ben Crump have joined forces to create an inspiring initiative at St. Thomas University's Benjamin L. Crump College of Law. This significant investment is more than a financial contribution; it represents a powerful commitment to empowering minority students, particularly African Americans, by making legal education accessible and affordable.

Ben Crump, a renowned civil rights attorney, passionately shares his journey and emphasizes the importance of dreaming big and persevering against all odds. This initiative not only transforms the lives of these aspiring lawyers but also promises to uplift entire

communities, fostering a new generation of civil rights advocates and social justice warriors.

"To be able to do this today and make our first endowment to the Benjamin Crump School of Law is just such an honor," Denny's CEO and President Kelli Valade said. "It's a true honor. Our commitment is ongoing and steadfast."

In an exclusive conversation with *Rolling Out* and its publisher and CEO, Munson Steed, Crump discussed the monumental endowment to St. Thomas University's Ben Crump College of Law, highlighting the impact on minority students and the importance of dreaming big and pursuing equity.

Munson Steed: Describe the day.

Ben Crump: The day was phenomenal. I mean, when you have a corporate giant, as iconic as Denny's, come and make an investment in your institution, the St. Thomas University, Ben Crump College of Law, it is a phenomenal thing. But it's even more phenomenal when you think about what we're actually doing. We are making it possible for minority students, especially African American students, to be able to afford a legal education, where they will become lawyers — many of them the first lawyers in their families, many of them first-time college graduates. I mean, it's life-changing for them. But it's also impactful for everybody in their family, everybody in their community. And what we're doing is making the next generation of civil rights lawyers and social justice warriors.

MS: Talk about the value proposition of living your dream, now that you've walked in. How important is it for Black people to know that they should live their dream?

BC: You have to dream dreams bigger than yourself. I like what Muhammad Ali says, "If your dream doesn't scare you, then you're not dreaming big enough." And I've been a poor little Black boy from rural North Carolina, growing up in the government housing projects with a single mother, who raised me and my two little brothers working cleaning hotel rooms in the morning, and working at the shoe factory in the evening, to make sure we had a roof over our heads, food on the table, and hope in our hearts.

Everything I am and everything I am to be is because of that strong Black woman's sacrifices. And to be able to rise from there to become one of the premier attorneys in America shows you that dreams do come true if you work hard enough for them, if you don't give up, if you subscribe to perseverance. I mean, our children today have to go after their dreams. And I know it gets daunting sometimes. But as long as you have breath in your body, then your dream still lives on within you.

And it's just a matter of you never ever giving up on that dream. I mean, and you got to dream with your eyes open. That means you can't just dream at night; you've got to wake up and do something about making your dream real. And that's what we do every day. My dream was to be like my personal hero, Thurgood Marshall, and to get up every day and go try to make a better world, a more equitable world, one where people in my community and people who look like me will have an equal opportunity at achieving the American dream.

And that's why I'm humbled when I think about coming from those humble beginnings to be the only living Black lawyer in America to have a law school named after him. We're here at this Catholic University in the heart of the most diverse parts of Miami, Florida, Miami Gardens, for your audience who don't know, used to be Liberty City, the most African American populated aspect of Miami.

And so to be here, where this University Law School is named after me, tells us that dreams do come true. And I hope that is a precedent for all of the other young people with dreams, and Denny's as a corporate giant in America, to invest in our mission of helping other young, Black, and Brown people realize their dream is a testament to the greatness of America.