



0. Selma March for Voting Rights - 1965 - Story Preface

1. President Harry S Truman desegregates the armed forces - 1948

2. Brown v Board of Education of Topeka, KS - 1954

3. Montgomery Bus Boycott 1955

4. The Little Rock Nine - 1957

5. The Freedom Rides - 1961

6. Sit-in Movement - 1960

7. March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom - 1963

8. The Civil Rights Act of 1964

9. Selma March for Voting Rights - 1965

10. Voting Rights Act of 1965

While the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was groundbreaking legislation, it did nothing to ensure that blacks in the south could vote. A number of devices, some dating back to the era of Reconstruction, prevented blacks from exercising the franchise.

Civil rights workers had been in Alabama for several years developing strategies to dramatize the lack of voting rights. On February 18, 1965, a young black man named Jimmie Lee Jackson was trying to prevent his grandmother from being beaten by law enforcement officials, and was shot point blank by a sheriff; he died several days later. The black community was seething with anger and even proponents of non-violent direction action worried if they could keep the peace. Several workers came up with the idea of a voting right march from Selma to the capitol in Montgomery to dramatize the lack of voting rights and spotlight the violence blacks often endured when they tried to vote.

On Sunday March 7 more than 500 demonstrators started down U. S. Highway 80 on the first leg of the trip. When they had crossed the Edmund Pettus Bridge they were met by a phalanx of law enforcement officials who demanded that they disperse. Within a few seconds, police officers, sheriffs and volunteers who had been deputized charged into the crowd, beating demonstrators with clubs, shocking them with cattle prods and spraying tear gas.

The melee was captured by journalists and television networks interrupted their regularly scheduled programs to show footage of the march. What came to be called Bloody Sunday shocked the nation and the world. President Johnson immediately condemned the violence and promised to send a civil rights bill to Congress.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Selma-March-for-Voting-Rights-1965-The-Big-Ten-Crucial-Events-in-the-Modern-Civil-Rights-Movement>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/Selma-March-for-Voting-Rights-1965-The-Big-Ten-Crucial-Events-in-the-Modern-Civil-Rights-Movement>

Questions 2 Ponder

How Did Murder Lead to the Voting Rights Act?

Media Stream

Selma March - Police Attack Marchers

On the 7th of March, 1965, a group of civil-rights activists—numbering around 600 people—attempted to begin a march between Selma and Montgomery, Alabama.

They were protesting the death of Jimmie Lee Jackson, an unarmed African-American who had been killed by police a few weeks before (in Marion, Alabama), and the inability of African-Americans to register-to-vote in Selma (where only 1-2% of African-Americans had successfully passed the highly restrictive requirements imposed on potential black voters by the State of Alabama).

The marchers, led by two young African-Americans named John Lewis (wearing a light-colored trench coat) and Hosea Williams (walking next to Lewis), were taking to heart an old African proverb:

*When You Pray,
Move Your Feet.*

The march began peacefully, as this photograph (likely taken by Charles White and provided to the Library of Congress by John Lewis) depicts. John Lewis, in March of 1965, was the leader of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).



Why did civil-rights leaders pick Selma as the starting point of their march? To answer that question, we have to examine its background a bit more closely.



Selma, located in Dallas County, had a history of unfair-election issues. In 1896, the U.S. House of Representatives had to adjudicate the contested results of a congressional election.

At the time, speaking about the contested result under consideration (the matter of Aldrich vs. Robbins, Fourth District, Alabama), W.H. (William Henry) Moody (a representative from Massachusetts) said this during a speech from the floor of the House:
...I need only appeal to the memory of members who have served in this House for years and who have witnessed the contests that time and time again have come up from the black belt of Alabama—since 1880 there has not been an honest election in the county of Dallas... Moody was referring to a time when African-American men were voting, as allowed by U.S. Constitutional amendment. Later, Southern States—like Mississippi and Alabama—began to impose impossible-to-meet requirements on black men who wanted to register. Similar requirements were not imposed on white men.

The existence of those voting restrictions, which effectively circumvented the Constitutional right to vote, were disenfranchising Southern black men.

After American women gained the right to vote, via the 19th Amendment, the same voting restrictions applied to Southern black women who, like their male counterparts, attempted to register.

Fed-up with the situation, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., decided it would be wise to have a march between Selma and Montgomery. Publicity, surrounding such an event, would cause white Americans throughout the country to realize the plight of would-be black voters who were denied the right to register (a prerequisite to voting on election day).

Selma, in short, seemed the perfect place to have a march.

Initially, the marchers who maintained silence as they moved along the sidewalks of the city, met no opposition. But when they reached the Edmund Pettus Bridge, they encountered a line of law-enforcement officials who warned the marchers to leave. The march, they were told in no uncertain terms, was an unlawful gathering.
As historical footage shows, the police gave the marchers little-to-no time to turn around (and leave the bridge) before they began to physically force them to leave. Tear gas was just one item the police used against the marchers.

These rotating images are from the FBI files. They show four scenes during which the police attacked the marchers, at Selma, on the 7th of March, 1965.



Images, from the FBI, online via the U.S. National Park Service.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Selma-March-Police-Attack-Marchers>



Selma March Attack

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/>



Richard Valeriani Injured in Protest March

A journalist for NBC News, in 1965, Richard Valeriani was covering a planned civil-rights march in February of 1965, when he was injured. It was the same march in which [Jimmie Lee Jackson](#) was fatally shot.

Decades later, when he was interviewed for "Eyes on the Prize," Valeriani remembered the events:

The march in Marion, Alabama, was a nighttime march, and a nighttime march was always dangerous. And there was always discussion within the [civil rights] movement whether or not to have nighttime marches because they knew they were dangerous.

We went up there this night, and we knew there was going to be trouble right away because local folks came up to us and threatened us, sprayed our cameras with black paint so we couldn't shoot, ordered us to put the cameras down and harassed us. And it was a very tense situation.

Somebody walked up behind me and hit me with a knife handle, hit me in the head with a knife handle, drew blood, which required stitches, and I was taken to a hospital.

But before I left, a white man walked up to me and he said, "Are you hurt? Do you need a doctor?" And I was stunned, and I put my hand to the back of my head and I pulled it back and it was full of blood. And I said to him, "Yeah, I think I do, I'm bleeding."

And then he thrust his face right up against mine and he said, "Well, we don't have doctors for people like you."

This image, online courtesy NBC News (via the Huffington Post) depicts Valeriani in his hospital bed on the 19th of February, 1965.

Image of Richard Valeriani, described above, online courtesy NBC News via the Huffington Post.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Richard-Valeriani-Injured-in-Protest-March>



John Lewis and Hosea Williams

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/>



Selma-to-Montgomery "Bloody Sunday" - Video Compilation

Compilation of historical footage, by Universal Newsreels, online courtesy U.S. National Archives.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Selma-to-Montgomery-Bloody-Sunday-Video-Compilation>

Civil Rights - Selma to Montgomery - March 21, 1965

Documentary of the Selma-to-Montgomery Civil-Rights March which began on March 21, 1965. Online, courtesy the Sharff family, via YouTube.

Director: Stefan Sharff

Cameramen:

Stefan Sharff

Christopher Harris

Julian Krainin

Alan Jacobs

Norris Eisenbrey

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Civil-Rights-Selma-to-Montgomery-March-21-1965>

