



## The Selma Campaign

### Learning Targets/Objectives:

- Discuss the purpose of the Selma Campaign.
- Understand the role of the Selma Campaign during the Civil Rights Movement.

### Success Criteria:

- Demonstrate an understanding of the importance of the Selma Campaign by completing the Selma picture prompt.
- Analyze the Selma March photo by James Karales to better understand the Selma Campaign.

### Lesson Content Overview:

Though the Civil Rights Act of 1964 included provisions to strengthen the voting rights of African Americans in the South, these measures were relatively weak and did not prevent states from effectively carrying on with their discriminatory voting practices.<sup>1</sup> The Selma Campaign dramatized Alabama's discriminatory voter registration policies by focusing national attention on a problem far beyond the state. The following events preceded and influenced the Selma marches.

- In 1963, civil rights activists began an effort to register Black voters in Dallas County, Alabama. Dallas County Voters League leader Amelia Boynton invited Dr. King and the SCLC to join the efforts already begun by the DCVL and SNCC to register voters in Selma. John Lewis was working with SNCC in Selma, but was not the point of contact for the SCLC, and Rev. Hosea Williams was an organizer in the SCLC.
- During 1963 and 1964, although activists brought potential voters by the hundreds to the registrar's office in the courthouse in Selma, they could not get them registered to vote.
- In January and February 1965, protests were held in Selma to bring attention to this violation of rights.
- Dr. King went to Selma on January 2, 1965; he spoke to over 700 people in Brown's Chapel of the African Methodist Episcopal church about the right to vote. After a state trooper killed a young black man, Jimmie Lee Jackson, 26, in nearby Marion, activist Lucie Foster called for a march on the capital.

On February 18, 1965, at about 9:30 p.m. Jimmie Lee, his grandfather, Cager Lee, and his mother, Viola Jackson, were participating in a nighttime demonstration near the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Marion, which was a very dangerous thing to do. Everyone was allowed to march at night because it wouldn't disturb the businesses. Police and state troopers surrounded the streets. When the police began to attack the marchers, all the streetlights went out. Cager Lee, 82 years old, was severely beaten by law enforcement and left bleeding. Jimmie Lee rushed him over to a café. When he tried to leave the cafe to take his grandfather to the hospital, state troopers pushed him back inside the café and began knocking out all of the lights and hitting those inside the café. When Jimmie Lee saw the trooper hit his mother, he attacked the trooper and was hit in the face by another officer and pushed against a cigarette machine. Then another officer pulled out a pistol and shot Jimmie Lee in the stomach. As he escaped the café, troopers chased after him, beating him until he fell unconscious. It was two hours later before Jimmie Lee was taken to the Good Samaritan Hospital in Selma

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<sup>1</sup> Nonviolence365 Online. The King Center eLearning Institute



because police officers arrested and charged him with assault and battery. His stomach had two bullet holes, one in the side and one in the front. Seven days later, on February 25, Jimmie Lee died from an infection caused by the shooting.

The funeral for Jimmie Lee was held in Marion on March 3. King spoke, calling Jimmie Lee, “a martyr in the crusade for human dignity and freedom.” King then led hundreds on a four-mile funeral walk in the rain from the AME Church down Highway 14 to the graveyard. At the graveyard, King offered a prayer and eulogy.<sup>2</sup>

On March 5, civil rights leaders informed President Lyndon Johnson of their plans to march from Selma to Montgomery.

Then, on Sunday, March 7, approximately 600 marchers started out on a five-day walk from Selma to the state capitol in Montgomery. The marchers departed Brown Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church and walked through town and across the Edmund Pettus Bridge. King was not part of this march. Alabama Governor George Wallace declared the caravan a threat to public safety and equipped Alabama state troopers with riot gear. When the marchers arrived at the foot of the Edmund Pettus Bridge’s east end, on the outskirts of Selma, they were met by between 100 and 200 state troopers along with Sheriff Jim Clark and his deputies. The deputies were mounted on horseback and armed with tear gas, cattle prods, nightsticks, and bullwhips. Trooper Major John Cloud ordered the marchers to return to Selma immediately. When they did not turn back, the law enforcement officers attacked them. The air was filled with tear gas; the troopers beat several protesters with billy clubs, and others were whipped and trampled by the horses. Several hundred were arrested, and 17 were hospitalized. This event would later become known as “Bloody Sunday.”

That evening, national news outlets showed the events on primetime television. Americans from all over the country began coming to Alabama by the thousands to participate in the marches. King arrived in Selma on March 8 despite Governor Wallace's stern order to state police that “there will be no march” and that they should use all necessary means to stop such marches that had “not been rescinded.” Despite the threat, dozens of clergy members followed King to Selma from across the country. “We will not walk alone,” King told people packed inside Selma's Brown’s Chapel Church on the night of his arrival. “We will walk until the sagging walls of segregation are crushed by the battering ram of the forces of justice. We are going to have to suffer some more, but we must let them know if they beat one Negro, they will have to beat 100 or 1000. We will leave them spattered with the blood of their Negro brothers. We can’t afford to stop for Alabama.” He called the Selma campaign a “date with destiny.”<sup>3</sup>

On March 9, Federal Judge Frank M. Johnson issued an injunction prohibiting the march. King, nevertheless, led a “symbolic” march, claiming no judge nor the President of the United States had the right to halt a peaceful demonstration. “Both the judge’s injunction and the President’s appeal reminded us of an action that condemns the robbed man rather than censuring the robber,” he told the media.<sup>4</sup> He vacillated that day, nevertheless. When the marchers reached the Edmund Pettus Bridge's top, they knelt for a short prayer before dispersing. King turned around and returned to the church, where another strategy could be planned. Some dubbed it “Turnaround Tuesday.” King and the civil rights leaders did not want to jeopardize the protest by violating the federal injunction.

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<sup>2</sup> Rex Thomas. “King Leads Four-Mile Funeral Walk.” *Birmingham Post-Herald*. March 4, 1965. 3.

<sup>3</sup> George Wallace and Martin Luther King, Jr. quoted in *Birmingham Post-Herald*. “Wallace vows ‘There will be no march.’” March 9, 1965. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. King. quoted in *Birmingham Post-Herald*. “Wallace vows ‘There will be no march.’” March 9, 1965. 1.



King and his supporters had filed a federal lawsuit requesting to be permitted to proceed with the march. On March 17, the courts overturned the ban on marches in Alabama. On March 19, President Johnson called the National Guard into service to protect the rights of American citizens to walk peaceably and safely from Selma to Montgomery. On Sunday, March 21, six days after President Johnson sent his voting rights proposal to Congress, about 3,200 marchers set out for Montgomery, walking 12 miles a day and sleeping in fields. This time the protesters were allowed to march across the Edmund Pettus Bridge and proceed to the state capitol. By the time they reached Montgomery shortly after 12:30 p.m. on Thursday, March 25, they were 25,000-strong. In Montgomery, a rally was held on the steps of the capitol building. Finally, the 54-mile march from Selma to Montgomery succeeded. “Our feet are tired, but our souls are rested,” King told the crowd. “. . . Segregation is on its death bed.”<sup>5</sup>

Less than five months after the last of the three Selma marches, on August 6, 1965, Dr. King witnessed President Johnson sign the Voting Rights Act into law. The effects of Congress passing the Voting Rights Act were wide and powerful. Between 1965 and 1990, the number of Black state legislators and members of Congress rose from two to 160. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 prohibits discrimination in voting practices or procedures because of race and color. It made huge strides toward making voting rights a reality. The Act banned State literacy tests that had been used to prevent blacks from voting. Anyone over the age of 21 could legally register to vote. In 1964, poll taxes were also prohibited with the ratification of the twenty-fourth Amendment.

### **SEL Opener: VOTING**

- 1) Provide each student with a set of voting ballots.
- 2) Have them write their names on each ballot.
- 3) With two boxes/buckets/trays on the teacher desk/front table, have the students vote on options similar to what is listed below:
  - Pizza vs. Cheeseburgers
  - Beach vs. Mountains
  - Sledding vs. Surfing
  - Tablet vs. TV

**Alternative Rules:** First allow all students to vote. After 2-4 votes, only allow certain students to vote based on what they are wearing (jeans, the color pink, etc.).

**Discussion Questions:** What did you like about the first few rounds? How did you feel about the last few rounds? What was fair or unfair about the first rounds? What was fair or unfair about the last rounds?

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<sup>5</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr. quoted in Tom Mackin. “25,000 Converge on State Capitol, End 5-Day Protest Trek from Selma.” March 26, 1965. 1-2.



### Instructional Activities:

- Activity 1: Read *March on! The Day My Brother Martin Changed the World* by Christine King Farris
  - Discuss the characters, plot, feelings, vocabulary, summary, and themes.
  
- Activity 2: Watch the video: [Sound Smart: The Voting Rights Act of 1965 \(History.com\)](#)
  - **Small Group/Individual Work:** Complete the [Guided Notes](#) / [Answer Key](#)
  
- Activity 3: Explore the [Alabama: Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail](#)
  - **Create a brochure advertising the following stations:**
    - **Station 1:** [Brown Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church](#)
    - **Station 2:** Lowndes County
    - **Station 3:** [Edmund Pettus Bridge](#)
    - **Station 4:** Alabama State Capitol
  - Additional Resource → [CLICK HERE](#)
  
- Activity 4: Read the Kids Britannica outline of the [Voting Rights Act](#)
  - **Small Group/Individual Work:** Complete the [Guided Notes](#) / [Answer Key](#)
  - **Large Group Discussion:** Review the guided notes.
    - Discussion Questions: *What was the purpose of the Voting Rights Act? How did it relate and impact the Civil Rights Movement?*
    - Acknowledge the themes among students' answers.
  
- Activity 5: Read the History.com outline of the [Voting Rights Act of 1965](#)
  - **Small Group/Individual Work:** Complete the [Guided Notes](#)
  - **Large Group Discussion:**
    - Review the guided notes.
    - Discussion Questions: *What was the purpose of the march from Selma to Montgomery? What was the impact of the Voting Rights Act of 1965?*
    - Acknowledge the themes among students' answers.

### Assessments:

- **OPTION 1:** Complete the [We March with Selma Picture Prompt](#).
  
- **OPTION 2:** Analyze the [Selma March photo](#) by James Karales. Write a poem about the march. Describe the weather, feelings, and purpose.



## **Adaptations for Student Needs**

### **IEP:**

- Sizes of student groups range
- Students team up with a peer partner, while others would prefer to work individually.
- There is a variety of small-group work
- Chunking information
- Visual cues and wait time
- Visual supports (maps, images, PowerPoint slides, handouts)
- Assessments will be modified, and students given extra time

### **ELD**

- Modified/simplified reading material
- Content-related lists/handouts of key terms
- Text is supported by visuals and connected to real-life experiences