

SELMA

THE BRIDGE TO THE BALLOT

Selma: The Bridge to the Ballot is the story of a courageous group of Alabama students and teachers who, along with other activists, fought a nonviolent battle to win voting rights for African Americans in the South. Standing in their way: a century of Jim Crow, a resistant and segregationist state, and a federal government slow to fully embrace equality. By organizing and marching bravely in the face of intimidation, violence, arrest and even murder, these change-makers achieved one of the most significant victories of the civil rights era.



1963

1964

1965

February 1963
Bernard Lafayette, from the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, arrives in Selma to organize youth.



September
Members of the Ku Klux Klan bomb Birmingham's 16th Street Baptist Church, killing four girls.

September/October
Teens in Selma react to the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church by protesting at Carter's Drug Store. Willie Robinson is beaten and four students are arrested.



October 7
Freedom Day—an all-out effort to register Selma voters—leads to arrests and brutal use of force by Sheriff Jim Clark.



July 2, 1964
President Lyndon B. Johnson signs the Civil Rights Act of 1964 into law.



July 9
Alabama Circuit Court Judge James Hare issues an injunction that forbids three or more people from publicly meeting in Selma in support of civil rights.

Late 1964
The Dallas County Voters League invites the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to come to Selma to support voting rights.

January 1965
Over 700 people defy the Hare injunction by attending a mass meeting at Brown Chapel, where Dr. King speaks.

January 18
Three hundred people, half of them high school students, attend a morning song service. Marches begin when the voter registration office opens.



January 22
More than 100 black teachers join the movement, marching from Clark Elementary School to the Selma courthouse. After being beaten back by club-wielding officers, they return to Brown Chapel, where 300 students greet them jubilantly.



January 25–29
Every day, hundreds of black voter registration applicants wait at the courthouse; mass arrests follow.

Alabama Governor George Wallace dispatches 50 state troopers to reinforce Sheriff Clark's men.



February 1
Dr. King and Ralph Abernathy, who has been helping King organize nonviolent protest campaigns since 1955, lead an adult march from Brown Chapel to the Selma courthouse. Both are arrested.

February 5
C. T. Vivian—a member of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference's executive staff—leads a group of adult activists to the courthouse; they are arrested.



Following the adults' arrests, 450 students approach the courthouse and are arrested as well. In Dallas and Perry counties, 3,850 civil rights activists have been arrested to date.



Dr. King and Ralph Abernathy are released on bail.

February 10
With leaders in jail, students have begun self-organizing. One hundred and sixty protest at the courthouse, where Sheriff Clark's men, using batons and cattle prods, force the young marchers out of town and down isolated country roads.



February 15
Voter registration offices are open for the last time in February; 1,500 activists participate in the largest march to date in Selma.

February 18
In the nearby city of Marion, state troopers join Sheriff Clark's men and swarm the town. They arrest James Orange for "contributing to the delinquency of minors" by encouraging students to march and sing freedom songs.

Civil rights supporters plan a short nighttime march to sing to Orange in jail. Police and state troopers attack and pursue fleeing marchers, including Jimmie Lee Jackson, into Mack's Café.

Jackson is shot by state trooper Jim Fowler and brought to Good Samaritan Hospital in Selma.

February 26
Jimmie Lee Jackson dies in Selma.



March 3
R. B. Hudson High School students boycott classes to attend Jimmie Lee Jackson's funeral service. Dr. King's sermon points at police brutality and the timidity of the federal government.

Dr. King announces the plan to bring the issue to Governor Wallace's doorstep with a march from Selma to Montgomery.



Governor Wallace orders state troopers to prevent the march.

March 7
Over 600 protesters leave Brown Chapel and cross the Edmund Pettus Bridge. At the far side, they are met by 50 riot-gear state troopers on horseback, along with Sheriff Clark's deputies and several dozen of his "posse."



As the marchers kneel to pray, the troopers charge into the crowd, clubbing people and firing tear gas. Nationwide coverage



of what becomes known as Bloody Sunday focuses the eyes of the nation—and Washington, D.C.—on Selma.

Dr. King issues a nationwide call for people of conscience to come to Selma and march on March 9.

March 9
Judge Johnson has issued an injunction against the march, which Dr. King decides to obey. Dr. King leads 2,000 people to the Edmund Pettus Bridge, kneels to pray, and turns the march around.



That night, three ministers who have traveled to Selma to support the movement are attacked. Minister James Reeb is the most seriously injured.

March 10
News of the attack on James Reeb prompts more voting rights demonstrations around the country. Pressure mounts on Washington, D.C.

Selma police surround the George Washington Carver Homes to contain marchers. Protesters dub the police line the "Berlin Wall."



Judge Johnson begins hearings to decide whether to allow the march.

March 11
James Reeb dies.



March 15
President Johnson addresses the nation and a joint session of Congress to propose a sweeping voting rights act.

March 17
Judge Johnson rules in favor of the marchers and orders Governor Wallace to protect the march to the capital.

March 21
Thousands of marchers depart from Brown Chapel in Selma headed for Montgomery and planning to stop at campsites along the way.



March 25
In the final four miles of the march, the group swells to 25,000 people. Montgomery is eerily quiet; Governor Wallace has urged white people to stay home, proclaiming a "danger holiday" for the state's white female employees.



Dr. King delivers his "Our God Is Marching On" address.

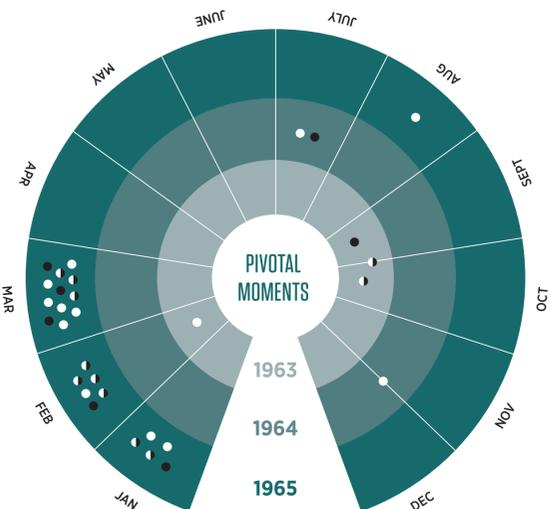
Later that night, Viola Liuzzo, a white civil rights activist, is killed by members of the Ku Klux Klan after leaving the protest.



December
The number of registered black voters in Dallas County has risen from 383 before passage of the Voting Rights Act to about 9,000—slightly more than half the black voting age population.



Across the South, the number of black voters rises to approximately 250,000 by the end of the year.



● Moments of activism or organized protest in support of African-American voting rights.
● Moments of community or government resistance to African-American voting rights (beyond the daily intimidation and oppression).
● Moments when organized efforts in support of African-American voting rights were met with direct or immediate opposition.