

SELMA AND THE 1965 VOTING RIGHTS ACT

On December 28, 1964, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) announced it would begin a voting campaign in Selma, Alabama. In Selma, the seat of Dallas County, Alabama, less than one percent of eligible African-American voters were registered. Previous efforts by local activists to register black voters were unsuccessful. On January 2, 1965, Martin Luther King, Jr., arrived in Selma to formally launch the campaign. The following timeline describes the course of events as they unfolded in Selma and the congressional response on Capitol Hill.



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1965

● Alabama ● Capitol Hill

- **February 5:** A 15-Member bipartisan congressional delegation arrives in Selma for a one-day trip to investigate reports of discrimination against and incarceration of African Americans trying to register to vote.
- **February 18:** A demonstrator named Jimmie Lee Jackson is shot by state troopers during a night-time march in Marion, Alabama. Jackson dies 8 days later.
- **March 3:** At Jimmie Lee Jackson's funeral, James Bevel, a member of the SCLC, announces that a 54-mile walk from Selma to Montgomery, led by King, will take place on Sunday, March 7.
- **March 6:** Worried about potential violence and an assassination attempt, King suggests postponing the march. King does not travel to Selma.
- **March 7:** Bloody Sunday: Demonstrators march six blocks from Brown Chapel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church to the Edmund Pettus Bridge, when Alabama state troopers attack them, injuring 100 and hospitalizing 17.
- **March 8:** Violence on the Pettus Bridge commands the front pages of newspapers across the country and around the world.
- **March 9:** Turnaround Tuesday: King and the SCLC organize a second demonstration from Brown Chapel AME Church to the Pettus Bridge and then back.
- **March 15:** President Lyndon Baines Johnson addresses a Joint Session of Congress about the necessity for voting rights legislation.
- **March 17:** The march from Selma to Montgomery is approved by a federal judge.
- **March 17:** The Voting Rights Act is introduced in the House and Senate.
- **March 21–25:** The march from Selma to Montgomery begins at Brown Chapel AME Church. Over the course of five days, demonstrators walk 54 miles to Montgomery along Highway 80. On the last day, King addresses a crowd of 35,000 in front of the Alabama capitol.
- **July 20:** A House and Senate conference committee convenes to work out differences between the two chambers' versions of the Voting Rights Act.
- **August 3:** Final passage of the Voting Rights Act in the House, 328–74.
- **August 4:** Final passage of the Voting Rights Act in the Senate, 79–18.
- **August 6:** President Johnson delivers speech in the Capitol Rotunda, followed by the bill signing in the President's Room in the U.S. Capitol.
- **August 10:** 300 residents of Selma line up to register at the Federal Building. On the first day, 107 successfully register.

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Timeline Sources

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