

Selected Timeline for Background Context for the Selma Marches for Voting Rights, (1954 – 1965)

1954 – Brown v. the Board of Education The Supreme Court ruling that struck down the “Separate but Equal” court ruling from 1896. This mandated integration of American public schools ruling that forced separation by its very nature is unequal.

1955 – Rosa Parks was arrested for refusing to give up her seat to a white man in Montgomery, Alabama. This instituted the Montgomery Bus Boycott that lasted over a year.

1957 – Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas was forcibly integrated by the National Guard presence sent by President Eisenhower.

1960 – Nonviolent ‘sit-ins’ took places, particularly in the South in attempts to integrate lunch counters and other public facilities.

1961 – ‘Freedom Riders’ (mostly black and white college students and young people) flooded inter-state buses starting in northern states traveling across the South in attempts to integrate bus terminals, waiting areas, rest rooms and lunch counters. Freedom Riders and their buses were savagely attacked by locals and police, particularly in Alabama.

1963 – Alabama Governor, George Wallace, stands in the doorway at the University of Alabama blocking registration of two black students, stating “segregation today, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever.” President Kennedy sent the National Guard to campus.

1963 – The March on Washington of approximately 250,000 people. Martin Luther King, Jr. gave his “I Have a Dream” speech to the large crowd and national media at the Lincoln Memorial.

1963 – Less than a month later, the 16th Street Baptist Church was bombed killing 4 young black girls and wounding others in Birmingham, Alabama.

1964 – President Lyndon Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964. It banned discrimination based on “race, color, sex, religion and national origin.”

1964 – ‘Freedom Summer’ The attempt to expand the voting rights for black Americans in Mississippi. Volunteers crossed the state registering black voters. Three activists, James Cheney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner, were brutally murdered.

1965 – In February, Jimmie Lee Jackson was beaten and shot in a peaceful demonstration near Selma. His death, like George Floyd, created the catalyst for organizing the Selma marches to Montgomery.

1965 – March 7 was deemed “Bloody Sunday,” when marchers were viciously attacked after crossing the Edmund Pettus while leaving Selma. National and Canadian media flooded the evening news with pictures and coverage of the attack on the marchers.

1965 – Between March 10 and March 25, Catholic sisters came to Selma to participate in demonstrations and the final 54-mile walk from Selma to Montgomery, March 21-25. Martin Luther King, Jr. gave is “How Long, Not Long” speech.

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1965 – In August, President Johnson signs the Voting Rights Act of 1965. This struck down “poll taxes” and “literacy tests” and other unfair practices used to limit black voter registration.

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For more details see:

<https://www.history.com/topics/civil-rights-movement/civil-rights-movement-timeline> and <https://www.britannica.com/list/timeline-of-the-american-civil-rights-movement> among other sites.