

WORKSHEET 63**Multicultural Worksheets****The Struggle for African American Voting Rights**

Read this passage and answer the questions that follow.

In 1965 Selma, Alabama, became a battleground of the civil rights movement. Like many other southern towns, over half of Selma's voters were African American. Yet only about one percent of African Americans, around 150 people, had been able to register to vote. Many more African Americans had wanted to register. However several white residents had threatened them. Many African Americans feared they might lose their jobs, or worse, face violence. Those who had come to the county courthouse to register had been arrested by Selma's sheriff.

Civil rights leaders in Selma decided to begin a campaign to increase voter registration among African Americans in the South. Their work brought Martin Luther King, Jr. to Selma. After an African American named Jimmie Lee Jackson was shot and killed during a voter rights protest, King spoke at his funeral. He said Jackson had been murdered by politicians who fed their followers "the stale bread of hatred and spoiled meat of racism" and by every African American who "passively . . . stands on the sidelines in the struggle for justice."

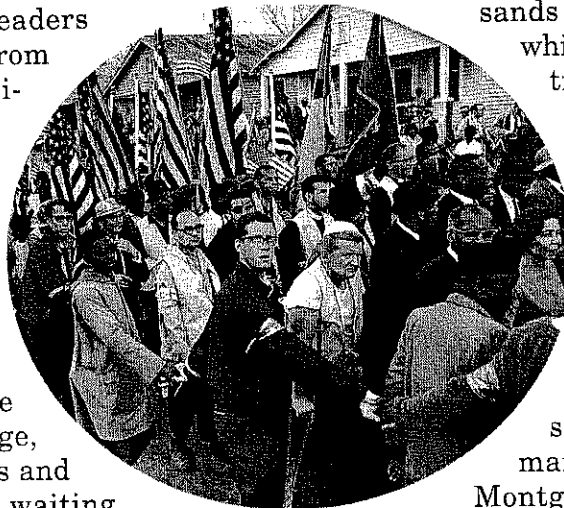
To call attention to the issue, King and other civil rights leaders organized a march from Selma to Alabama's capital city, Montgomery. Over 500 protesters gathered on Sunday morning, March 7, to begin the 50-mile walk. Yet the marchers never made it beyond Selma's city limits. When they reached the Edmund Pettus Bridge, about 200 state troopers and sheriff's deputies were waiting for them. In what came to be called "Bloody Sunday" the troopers and deputies

attacked the marchers with clubs, whips, and tear gas. Sheyann Webb, who was eight years old at the time, recalled the incident:

[The] closer we got to the bridge, the more I began to get frightened. . . . I could see hundreds of policemen. The helmets, state troopers, dogs and horses, police cars. . . . My heart was beginning to beat real, real fast. Then people began to kneel down and pray again. . . . I knelt down with everybody. Shortly after we got up, a burst of tear gas began. I could see the troopers and policemen swinging their . . . clubs. People began to run, and dogs and horses began to trample them. You could hear people screaming . . . I began to run. . . . I . . . was crying. . . . I was shocked at what I had seen.

Millions of television viewers across America watched in horror at the violence. A few days later, a white minister who supported the civil rights movement was killed in Selma. Many more were attacked. King called on religious leaders from all over the nation to come to Selma for another march.

Ministers, rabbis, priests and thousands of others, both black and white answered the call. This time Army troops and the Alabama National Guard were there to protect the marchers. The Guard had been put under federal control by President Johnson after Alabama's governor told the President he could not be responsible for the safety of the marchers. The march ended peacefully in Montgomery four days later. A victory had been won in the long struggle for African American voting rights.



1. Why were many African Americans in Selma, and across the South, not registered to vote?

2. Why did Martin Luther King, Jr. come to Selma? _____

3. What action did civil rights activists in Selma take to draw attention to their cause?

4. What was "Bloody Sunday?" How did it create more support for voting rights for African Americans? _____

5. **Critical Thinking** Why might some white residents of Selma and other southern towns have tried to prevent African Americans from registering to vote? _____
