

## MARCH 7 , 1965 -- SELMA , ALA . BLOODY SUNDAY

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SELMA, Ala . -- Times have changed in the 20 years since **Bloody Sunday** in 1965, when state troopers and a Dallas County sheriff's posse, armed with clubs, attacked a group of civil rights marchers and made Selma a worldwide symbol of racial injustice.

As civil rights leaders assemble here today to commemorate **Bloody Sunday** and re-enact the 1965 voting rights **march** from Selma to Montgomery, the rancor has subsided.

"The hostility is gone," said the Rev. John Lewis, now an Atlanta city councilman who helped lead the 1965 **march** as head of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNNC).

Today, said one of the city's black leaders, the Rev. F.D. Reese: "Selma is a good place to live. We've come a long way."

He said he "would hasten to add," however, that "it's still not what it should be. . . . The hostility has subsided, but there is a need for a more genuine race relations. I think we have learned to intelligently tolerate each other. But toleration doesn't generate love."

The segregation academies that sprang up after federal courts began ordering integration of schools still operate, and the Selma Country Club has no black members. Black unemployment is about double that among whites.

BUT COMPARED with 20 years ago, there has been great progress, Mr. Reese said. Black men and women, who make up a slight majority in this town of 26,684, can register, vote, get jobs in the police, fire and sheriff's departments and win appointment and election to political office.

Black children attend Selma public schools with whites -- though under federal court order -- and black customers eat in Selma restaurants that once refused to serve them.

In city government, blacks serve as personnel director, housing code enforcement officer and superintendent of the department that handles garbage pickup and other services. The head of the city community action agency is black. So is the assistant chief of police.

Last year, Jacqueline Walker was elected tax collector, the first black person to win countywide office in Dallas County since Reconstruction. Before she could take office, however, she was fatally injured when her husband lost control of their car on an icy highway.

Two of the six seats on the Selma City Council are filled by black men. Mr. Reese, who is pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church and principal of Eastside Junior High School, served on the council until last year, when he resigned to run for mayor.

THAT ELECTION proved that some things remain unchanged in Selma. Joe Smitherman, the white incumbent, got 61 percent of the vote. He was mayor in 1965.

Although the candidates never made race an issue, the vote broke down along racial lines.

The 1980 census showed blacks in a majority in Selma, 14,047 to 12,392, but they trail slightly in the number of registered voters.

Mayor Smitherman said last week he planned to attend the morning church service today that opens the commemoration of **Bloody Sunday**. He said the Rev. Jesse Jackson, the 1984 presidential candidate who will preach the sermon, issued the invitation.

The Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), founded by the late Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., conducted the Selma-to-Montgomery **march** 20 years ago and is sponsoring the re-enactment. Dr. Joseph Lowery, SCLC president, and other civil rights leaders, many of whom participated in the 1965 **march**, will walk the 50 miles over the next four days, returning by car or bus to motels or private homes each night. The marchers will hold a rally at the state capitol on Thursday.

SCLC leaders hope that the **march** will give new life to the flagging civil rights movement.

IT WAS SELMA, on **March 7**, 1965, that gave the movement its greatest boost. The violence that **Sunday** on the Edmund Pettus bridge, on the outskirts of town, occurred in the presence of reporters and cameramen from the television networks, wire services and the country's largest newspapers and magazines. A nation's outrage spurred Congress to enact the 1965 Voting Rights Act, which made black voters a power to be reckoned with in the South.

Dr. King, who missed the **March 7** confrontation but led the 50-mile **march** two weeks later, appeared on the cover of Time magazine. Life magazine's front cover showed the SCLC's Hosea Williams and SNCC's John Lewis leading the marchers two abreast down the slope of the bridge toward the waiting state troopers.

Telecasts that **Sunday** night showed white state troopers and posse members as they lobbed tear gas canisters and waded into the more than 500 black demonstrators swinging nightsticks and wooden canes. Horses ridden by mounted posse members trampled the fallen demonstrators.

"I'm a veteran of World War II, and an infantryman," said Mr. Williams, now an Atlanta minister and businessman who was Dr. King's field director during the Selma voting rights drive. "In the war, I saw 12 of my buddies killed in one day. But I've never seen the blood spilled that was spilled on the Edmund Pettus bridge."

The troopers and Dallas County posse members -- untrained civilians deputized on the spot by then-Sheriff Jim Clark -- drove the marchers back across the bridge, which spans the Alabama River. With the lawmen in pursuit, the demonstrators retreated for about a mile to the Brown Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church, where the **march** had begun.

Seventeen demonstrators were admitted to a hospital for treatment of injuries. Among them was Lewis, then 25, who suffered a concussion.

AMERICANS from coast to coast responded instantly and angrily, turning out by the thousands to demonstrate on behalf of the black people of Selma. There were sit-ins and other demonstrations in Los Angeles, Cleveland, Detroit, Washington, New York and Boston; in Berkeley, Calif., and Concord, N.H.; in Kalamazoo and Port Huron and Lexington, Ky.

President Lyndon Johnson issued a statement saying: "I am certain Americans everywhere join in deploring the brutality with which a number of Negro citizens of Alabama were treated when they sought to dramatize their deep and sincere interest in attaining the precious right to vote. The best legal talent in the federal government is engaged in preparing legislation which will secure that right for every American."

Within the week, he sent the legislation to Congress, which enacted it that August as the Voting Rights Act of 1965. It struck down literacy tests and other such restrictions on prospective voters in all elections -- federal, state and local -- and provided for officials of the U.S. government to register voters if state officials refused to do so.

Selma and the Edmund Pettus bridge -- named for a turn-of-the-century U.S. senator from Alabama -- were infamous.

Smitherman, who has been mayor since 1964 except for a one-year fling at retirement, said black Americans today "look on it as a holy bridge and a holy city."

AND THE REST of the world is beginning to forgive. Smitherman said there are 65 kinds of manufacturing plants in the Selma area, many of them new. They include Beech Aircraft Corp. facilities and a new plant under construction by Hammermill Paper Co.

"People like Beechcraft wouldn't come here, or Hammermill, if we had bad race relations," Smitherman said.

Smitherman said 30 percent of his department heads, 35 percent of city police officers and 45 percent of city fire fighters are black.

"We're not perfect," Smitherman said, "but I think we have good race relations here."

Last week, Mary McCloud, a 24-year-old white waitress, sat with a black co-worker and friend, Cathy Brims, 30, at a table in the Selma pancake house where they work. Eddie Munford, 42, a former Montgomery policeman and now a Selma security guard, sat with them. Munford also is black.

"It's changed a lot from 20 years ago," Brims said. "Then, you'd have had white folks sitting up front there and black folks sitting back here." Along Highway 80, where the **march** will take place this week, residents and merchants seemed unconcerned.

"You know, time cures things a lot," said storekeeper Roy Bailey, 59, as he stood behind the counter of the family grocery store and Gulf station outside Montgomery.

"We've been here -- what? -- 40 years?" he said. "You have to change with the times or you can't stay that long."

In a bungalow on Highway 80 in Lowndes County, Sadie Haralson talked about the pride she felt as a black woman watching the marchers pass on the road 20 years ago.

"I remember it quite well," she said. "It made me feel so good."

Mrs. Haralson, now 62 and widowed, plans to watch again as the procession moves through Lowndes County. This time, sheriff's officers will provide an escort. Mrs. Haralson's son, Rufus, is a sheriff's deputy.

Lowndes County, Dallas County, Selma, the state of Alabama, the entire South: All have changed with the times.

According to Mr. Lewis, only 2.4 percent of eligible blacks were on the voter rolls of Dallas County when the registration drives began here in the mid-'60s. No blacks held office or worked in the police, fire or sheriff's departments.

MR. REESE led the early registration attempts, organizing teachers and other groups to **march** on the Dallas County courthouse. In January 1965, Dr. King arrived. By then he was world-renowned, winner of the 1964 Nobel Peace Prize.

The pace quickened, though few blacks succeeded in registering to vote. The registrar's office was open only two days a month, and the few blacks who managed to get inside the courthouse were nearly all rejected.

Sheriff Jim Clark assigned numbers to those who showed up at the courthouse and forced them to wait outside until their numbers were called, if they were called at all. But spurred by Dr. King, Hosea Williams and the young John Lewis, they stayed, sometimes huddled in the rain. Clark filled the jail with those who objected.

The violence on the Edmund Pettus bridge, and the Voting Rights Act that resulted, changed all that.

Voter registration in Dallas County and across the South has multiplied since 1965. In 1965, 92,737 black voters were registered in Alabama. Last year, according to the Voter Education Project in Atlanta, the total was 515,751.

Dallas County alone had 18,591 black voters on its rolls as of last Nov. 6, county records showed. Dallas County's black population in the 1980 census was 29,488, compared with a white population of 24,205.

But whites retained an edge among registered voters. Last November, the county had 19,648 white voters on its rolls.

Other Southern states show similar increases in registration of black voters, some of them even more pronounced. Mississippi, for instance, had 28,500 black voters registered in 1965. Last year, it had 458,996. For Georgia, the increase during that period was from 167,663 to 594,484.

Black voter registration in the 11 Deep South states increased from 1,907,279 in 1965 to 5,597,212 last year.

Blacks make up about 20 percent of the population of the 11 states (Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia).

With the vote has come political power. The Voter Education Project reports that as of November 1983, blacks held 2,861 constitutional offices -- 3.6 percent of the total -- in the 11 Southern states. There were 142 black mayors, 135 state representatives and 21 state senators. Andrew Young, a chief aide to Dr. King, is now mayor of Atlanta.

THERE HAVE been two other major effects. White politicians are now paying attention to their black constituents. And the migration of young black men and women to Northern states has been reversed.

Other things are the same, yet changed. George Wallace was governor when the Selma marchers arrived in Montgomery in 1965. And he is Alabama's governor today. But Wallace, who once pledged "Segregation today, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever," now crowns black beauty queens, hugs black babies and openly courts the black vote. He credited black support for his election in 1982 to a fourth term as governor.

The state troopers who halted the first Selma-to-Montgomery **march** in 1965 were acting on Wallace's orders, although he later expressed regret that there was violence. The **march** was carried out two weeks later only after a federal judge enjoined Wallace and other state and local officials from interfering.

This week's **march** is being conducted with Wallace's approval, and state troopers, 25 percent of whom are now black, will escort the marchers along U.S.-80.

"I THINK we all recognize that people can change," said Robert F. Jones, who was a member of Dr. King's congregation at the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery in the early 1960s.

Jones said he was turned away repeatedly when he tried to register to vote at the Montgomery County courthouse, although he had a degree from historic Tuskegee Institute and held a prestigious job for a black man of that day, as a district agent with the Auburn University Agricultural Extension Service.

Now, said Jones, who is 62 and retired, blacks have no impediments to registration.

He never would have voted, he said, without Dr. King.

"It hadn't happened before, and I don't think it would have happened," he said. "I think it would have been 50 years or more. It wouldn't have happened in my lifetime."

THE MAN who brought Dr. King to Montgomery agrees. Robert D. Nesbitt Sr. was a deacon and head of the pulpit committee at the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in 1954. A friend of Nesbitt's who knew he was looking for a new pastor recommended a 25-year-old Atlantan not long out of Morehouse College, "Mike" King.

Nesbitt said he visited the young Martin Luther King Jr. at his home in Atlanta and convinced him to come for a trial sermon. He came, "fell in love with the church, and we fell in love with him," Nesbitt said.

The next year, the young King organized the Montgomery bus boycott, in which blacks won the right to ride in any seat they chose on city buses.

"I'll always feel that if he hadn't come to Montgomery, the civil rights movement never would have gotten off the ground," Nesbitt said.

The church is now the Dexter Avenue King Memorial Baptist Church.

LOOMING ABOVE IT, just up the hill, is the state capitol. There, overlooking the church, is a statue of Jefferson Davis, president of the Confederacy. At the top of the capitol steps, a bronze star marks the spot where Davis took the oath of office on Feb. 18, 1861.

Now, throughout the South, there are memorials as well to Dr. King: busts, statues, schools and streets named in his honor. One such street is in Selma. In Montgomery, Interstate 85 inside the city limits is now known as the Martin Luther King Jr. Expressway.

Jimmy Carter, as governor of Georgia, hung Dr. King's portrait in the gallery of honored white politicians in the state capitol at Atlanta. The much-publicized gesture helped Carter get elected as the first president from the Deep South since the Civil War.

And Gov. Wallace issued a statement last year supporting the move to make Dr. King's birthday a national holiday.

RECENTLY, WALLACE also denounced the South African government's policy of apartheid.

Wallace is refusing requests from reporters for interviews about the Selma **march**. His staff refers those requests to the governor's assistant press secretary, Hezekiah Wagstaff, who is black.

The governor, Wagstaff said, "is pleased and delighted that black Americans are able to cast their ballots on an unrestricted basis."

Wagstaff described Wallace's race against Lt. Gov. George McMillan in the 1982 Democratic primary for governor as "literally a dogfight" and said that "the black vote (carried) it for the governor."

Others disagree. The Rev. Lewis said McMillan got most of the black vote, but Wallace won anyway.

Wagstaff said that although some black Alabamians still view Wallace as a symbol of everything they oppose, "the reality of the situation is that a good number of blacks realized we needed a George Wallace for the things he can do other than on the race issue. . . . They need jobs they can go to in the daytime."

Wallace's reputation for providing jobs overrode the race issue, Wagstaff said.

SINCE TAKING office in January 1973, Wallace has appointed 385 blacks to state boards, commissions, judgeships and offices on the executive staff, Wagstaff said. That is nearly 15 percent of the 2,600 appointments he has made. Wagstaff said 46 of the 196 voting registrars Wallace has appointed are black.

The top black member of Wallace's staff is Delores Pickett, his executive assistant for minority affairs. A former actress, she once danced in "Cabaret" on Broadway and played the role of Sister Charity on the Flip Wilson Show on television.

"We are working to correct -- not change, correct -- the image of Alabama," she said. "For instance, we now advertise in Ebony, advertisements for the state of Alabama, and we have a black heritage brochure."

But all of this goes back to Selma and the Edmund Pettus bridge.

IN AN INTERVIEW, the Rev. Hosea Williams described Dr. King's plan: They were to observe non-violence and try to get arrested, to call public attention to the plight of Selma's black citizens.

"I was head of the field staff," Mr. Williams said. "Fill up the jail: That was my job."

Sheriff Clark played right into the plan. Mr. Williams said Clark arrested him eight times.

Clark also arrested John Lewis.

"January 18th, 1965, was my first major demonstration; I remember well the day," Mr. Lewis said. "Sheriff Clark told me, 'John Lewis, you're an outside agitator, and an agitator is the lowest form of humanity.'"

"I said, 'Sheriff Clark, I may be an agitator, but I'm not an outside agitator. I grew up 90 miles from here.'"

"He said, 'You're under arrest.' "

IN SUBSEQUENT years, Clark would be arrested himself on a drug conspiracy charge and was sent to federal prison. He now sells mobile homes in Scottsboro, **Ala** .

When the momentous day came that **March 7** , Dr. King was in Atlanta. Williams said Dr. King remained there to fill in for his ailing father at **Sunday** services at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta.

"I believe they'd have killed Dr. King," Williams said.

Today, the street in front of the Brown Chapel AME Church in Selma is named for Dr. King. The inscription on the marble pedestal also pays tribute to him and others killed in 1965 in the civil rights wars in Alabama: Viola Liuzzo of Detroit, the Rev. James Reeb of Boston and Jimmie Lee Jackson of Marion, **Ala** . Ku Klux Klansmen shot and killed Mrs. Liuzzo as she and a companion drove along Highway 80 between Selma and Montgomery on Feb. 16. Jackson, a pulpwood cutter, died of a gunshot suffered when police and state troopers broke up a voting rights demonstration in Marion on Feb. 18. A white man with a club, attacking from behind, crushed Mr. Reeb's skull as he left a black Selma restaurant after marching with Dr. King the afternoon of **March 9**.

A sniper's bullet cut down Dr. King on the balcony of a Memphis motel on April 4, 1968.

"The people of Alabama literally wrote the Voting Rights Act with their blood on Highway 80," Councilman Lewis said last week. "I would say that Selma, the state of Alabama, the South, this whole region, is an altogether different place because of what happened in Selma, **Ala** ."

Mr. Lewis can still quote from memory long passages of President Johnson's address to a joint meeting of Congress.

"It was his 'We shall overcome' speech," Mr. Lewis said: 'I speak tonight on the dignity of man. . . .'

He quoted for several minutes.

"That speech," he said, "was the turning point. . . . Dr. King cried that night when President Johnson spoke. We knew then we had won."

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