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of The Historic Trail  
is a 501c3 non-profit  
organization.

Our mission is to educate  
and enlighten about the  
events surrounding the 1965  
Voting Rights Movement.

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SELMA FRIENDS OF THE HISTORIC TRAIL

P.O. Box 135  
Selma, AL 36702-0135



Selma Friends  
**SELMA-TO-MONTGOMERY**  
VOTING RIGHTS TRAIL  
OF THE  
**HISTORIC**

Chairman  
Dr. Frederick D. Reese

## HISTORY OF THE 'TRAIL'

# HISTORIC VOTING RIGHTS TRAIL

Historians view the **1965 Selma-to-Montgomery Voting Rights March** as the emotional peak of the Modern Civil Rights Movement that began in the 1950's. The voting rights campaign was a grassroots effort, where the actions of ordinary, but courageous, people led to major social change.

In the **1960's**, Alabama, like most states in the former Confederacy, restricted the right of African-Americans to vote. County registrars throughout the Black Belt region of Alabama imposed various obstacles to prospective African-American voters, including limitations on voting office hours and staffing, difficult literacy tests, and a voucher system that required sponsorship of each new registrant.

In **1963**, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) arrived in Selma at the request of local civil rights leaders.

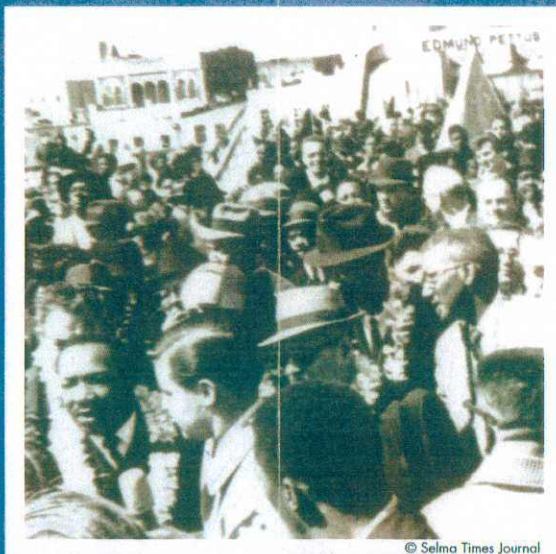
In **1964**, only 2.2 percent of African-Americans over age 21 were registered to vote in Dallas County, Alabama. The ability of African-Americans to register in Dallas County was due to the long-standing efforts of the Dallas County Voters League (DCVL) and its key organizing figure, Samuel Boynton.

Passage of the Civil Rights Act of **1964** added momentum to Selma's grass roots campaign. Local law enforcement, led by segregationist Dallas County Sheriff, Jim Clark, met renewed protests with physical violence. In July of 1964 Circuit Judge James Hare prohibited meetings of three or more people in Selma, effectively bringing protests to a halt.

Mrs. Amelia Boynton, Mrs. Marie Foster, Mr. Ernest Doyle, Rev. John D. Hunter, Mr. James Gildersleeve, Rev. Henry Shannon, Mr. Ulysses Blackmon, and Dr. Frederick D. Reese, the steering committee of DCVL referred to as the "Courageous Eight" continued to meet and strategize on the Selma movement.

In a highly symbolic gesture, 105 black teachers led by DCVL President Frederick D. Reese, marched to the Dallas County Courthouse. The willingness of local teachers to risk their safety and careers encouraged other middle-class professionals to participate in the movement. Many school children joined their teachers in the demonstrations as well.

The SCLC held a rally in Marion (County seat for Perry County) on the night of February 19, **1965**. As the rally ended, Alabama State troopers assaulted attendees, including the family of Jimmie Lee Jackson. A trooper shot Jackson when he attempted to protect his mother from the attack. On February 25, Jackson died from the wounds inflicted at the Good Samaritan Hospital in Selma, Alabama.



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Jackson's death caused outrage within the African-American community in Marion and Selma. Civil rights leaders began to call for a march to Montgomery to protest his shooting and seek protection against increasing white violence.

On Sunday March 7, **1965**, about 600 protestors left Brown Chapel, traveling across the Edmund Pettus Bridge east toward Montgomery. As marchers neared the Selmont area of US Highway 80 and Kings Bend Road, they encountered local law enforcement officers and a 'posse' of local whites. The group, wielding tear gas and clubs, violently drove back the protesters. Known as "Bloody Sunday," the attack generated national attention and created an outpouring of support for the voting rights cause.

Another symbolic march in Selma, known as "Turnaround Tuesday" left Brown Chapel to the point of Sunday's confrontation near the Edmund Pettus Bridge. This time state troopers allowed the marchers to kneel, pray and return to Selma without incident. However, Unitarian minister and march participant James Reeb was struck on the head and killed on the night of March 9.

U. S. District Court Judge Frank M. Johnson ordered State and Federal law enforcement protection for the marchers, and organizers prepared for the 54-mile, five-day march to begin on Sunday, March 21. President Lyndon B. Johnson federalized Alabama National Guard troops and assigned FBI, Federal Marshals and regular Army troops to protect the marchers.

More than 4,000 participants left Brown Chapel in the early afternoon of March 21. This time the march succeeded in walking safely out of Selma and toward Montgomery on US Highway 80.

On the fourth night, camped on the grounds of the St. Jude complex in Montgomery. On the fifth day, before their arrival at the Alabama State Capitol, the Freedom Riders, including many celebrities, gathered in Selma.

On March 25, **1965**, 25,000 marchers gathered at the state capitol for the rally where Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered his famous speech, "How Long, Not Long" was delivered that same evening. Viola Liuzzo, a Detroit housewife, who volunteered to drive the bus back to Selma after the rally, was killed by a sniper's bullet on the way back to Selma. Her death increased support for passage of the Voting Rights Act.

On August 6, **1965** President Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act, recognized as the most significant victory in the struggle for equal rights. By November of 1965, approximately 8,000 African-Americans registered to vote in Dallas County.

In **1990**, Congress directed the Secretary of the Interior to study the route of 1965.

In **1993**, National Park Service's National Trail Study recommended that the 54-mile route become a component of the national trail system, administered by the National Park Service.

In **1996**, the Alabama Department of Transportation (ALDOT) recommended the route as an All American Road, the highest Federal designation a road can receive under the National Scenic Byways Program.

On November 12, **1996**, President Bill Clinton signed the law designating the march route as the "Selma-to-Montgomery National Historic Trail".

In **1999**, a portion of Highway 80, three miles east was designated as Dr. Frederick D. Reese Parkway, in honor of his persistent spirit for justice for all Americans born or naturalized in the United States.

In **2004**, Selma Friends Trail group began collaboration with the Yellowstone National Park Service on research and development of a shared tour/transportation system for the 'Trail'.