



Alabama Public Television Education

Selma to Montgomery Fact Sheet

Overview

The Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma is the site of Bloody Sunday, the first of three attempts by demonstrators to march from Selma to Montgomery to protest for voting rights and against the killing of civil rights activist Jimmie Lee Jackson. Approximately 600 protesters were led by John Lewis of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and Hosea Williams of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

When the marchers tried to cross the bridge on March 7, 1965, they were met by 65 state troopers, approximately 10 Dallas County sheriff's deputies, and 15 men on horseback who had been deputized by Selma sheriff Jim Clark. Under his direction, they attacked the marchers with tear gas and severely beat many. Television and newspaper reporters covered the march, and scenes from the brutal attack were broadcast around the country. The violence shocked the nation.

A second attempt to cross the bridge took place on March 9, but it too was unsuccessful and became known as Turnaround Tuesday. Finally, on March 21, 1965, marchers led by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. crossed the bridge. People from around the nation had come to join the protest, and almost 8,000 began the march. By the time they arrived in Montgomery on March 25, more than 25,000 people had gathered at the foot of the Alabama State Capitol to hear Dr. King's famous "How Long, Not Long" speech.

Bloody Sunday and the Selma to Montgomery March drew national and international attention to voting rights. On August 6, 1965, Congress passed the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and Pres. Lyndon Johnson signed it into law. It prohibits denying citizens the right to vote based on race or skin color.

Edmund Pettus Bridge is named for Edmund Pettus, a Confederate general, member of the Ku Klux Klan, and U.S. Senator. He was born in 1821 in Limestone County, Alabama, and practiced law in Selma. He died in 1907 in North Carolina. Pettus was a secessionist and lifelong supporter of white supremacy. US Highway 80, the route taken by marchers to Montgomery, runs over the bridge, which was dedicated in May 1940. The Selma to Montgomery March route is now a National Historic Trail. The Edmund Pettus Bridge is a National Historic Landmark. On March 7, 2012, Pres. Barak Obama, the 44th US president and the country's first Black president, crossed the bridge in honor of the 50th anniversary of Bloody Sunday.

Quick Facts

Bloody Sunday: March 7, 1965

Selma to Montgomery March: March 21-25, 1965

Voting Rights Act of 1965: signed into law on August 6, 1965

Number of marchers on March 7, 1965: 600

Number of protestors in Montgomery on March 25: 8,000

Miles marched between Selma and Montgomery: approximately 50

Days it took to walk from Selma to Montgomery: 5 (March 21 to March 25)

Edmund Pettus Bridge: 1,248 feet long, 42.3 feet wide, 100 feet above the river at its highest point

For More Information

Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail, National Park Service

<https://www.nps.gov/semo/index.htm>

JoAnn Bland recording

<https://www.nps.gov/media/video/view.htm?id=C4DF6885-1DD8-B71C-073155A873CBBDDF>

Maps of Selma to Montgomery marches

<https://www.nps.gov/articles/selmatomongtomermarch.htm>

ADAH Alabama Moments

Selma to Montgomery Voting Rights March Resources

<http://www.alabamamoments.alabama.gov/sec59qs.html>

<http://www.alabamamoments.alabama.gov/sec59det.html>

<https://archives.alabama.gov/teacher/rights/rights4.html>

<https://digital.archives.alabama.gov/digital/collection/lessons/id/40/rec/8>

Alabama Legacy Moments

<https://www.alabamalegacy.org/selma-montgomery-march/>

United States Civil Rights Trail: Edmund Pettus Bridge, includes clip of Obama's speech on the 50th anniversary and a 360-view of the bridge

<https://civilrightstrail.com/attraction/edmund-pettus-bridge/>

Encyclopedia of Alabama

Image: <http://encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/m-6025>

Selma to Montgomery March

<http://encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/h-1114>

Modern Civil Rights Movement

<http://encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/h-1580>

Bloody Sunday

<http://encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/h-1876>

Martin Luther King Jr. Research and Education Institute

“How Long, Not Long” speech

<https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/our-god-marching>

National Constitutional Center
Voting Rights Act of 1965

<https://constitutioncenter.org/interactive-constitution/blog/on-this-day-the-voting-rights-act-of-1965-is-signed>

Encyclopedia of Alabama
Voting Rights Act of 1965

<http://encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/h-4216>

PBS Learning Media

50th Anniversary of Selma-Montgomery March

<https://aptv.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/7322fc4d-8b97-428b-a759-94d74d04a356/clip-1-50th-anniversary-of-the-selma-to-montgomery-march/>

<https://www.c-span.org/classroom/document/?9855>

Video

Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3RFbvSX7Ojo>

Images (see below)

Civil Rights Marchers Tell Stories of Their Photos

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/mar/01/bloody-sunday-remembered-civil-rights-marchers-tell-story-of-their-iconic-photos>

Bloody Sunday: A Look Back

<https://www.cbsnews.com/pictures/selma-bloody-sunday-look-back/>

Bonus Point: What's in a Name?

“Who Was Edmund Pettus?” Smithsonian magazine

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/who-was-edmund-pettus-180954501/>

Effort to Rename the Bridge for Rep. John Lewis

<https://johnlewisbridge.com/>

John Lewis obituary

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/17/us/john-lewis-dead.html>

Lewis remains cross bridge for last time

<https://apnews.com/article/john-lewis-us-news-ap-top-news-sc-state-wire-voting-03f249c36a8a1d0470145e84fc93f331>

Bonus Point 2: Who Marched?

People of all ages and backgrounds were present on Bloody Sunday and participated in the Selma to Montgomery March. Here are interviews with two.

Sheyann Webb-Christburg, “Youngest Freedom Fighter,” 8-years-old on Bloody Sunday

<https://www.montgomeryadvertiser.com/videos/news/2021/03/07/sheyann-webb-christburg-known-youngest-freedom-fighter-tells-her-story-bloody-sunday/4621464001/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5ux7r6JliaM>

John Suttles

Suttles’ raincoat is the Yellowhammer History Hunt Treasure.

https://www.appenmedia.com/community/local-man-recalls-experience-at-bloody-sunday/article_c1cbf36c-10d6-11e8-85ee-3b86ee9d64cf.html

Notable quotes from Mr. Suttles

1. “In all revolutions, no matter what they’re about, young people tend to make it happen. There is always the possibility of doing extraordinary things.”
2. “It’s important to stay involved in the civil duties of American. This is a democracy. If we can’t vote or get discouraged, it just won’t happen. This is a great country. We need to keep it this way. The only way we can do that is to get involved and vote.”