



SELMA

THE



BRIDGE

TO THE



BALLOT



TEACHING TOLERANCE  
A PROJECT OF THE SOUTHERN POVERTY LAW CENTER

VIEWER'S GUIDE GRADES 6-12

*Selma: The Bridge to the Ballot* is the story of a courageous group of Alabama students and teachers who, along with other activists, fought a nonviolent battle to win voting rights for African Americans in the South. Standing in their way: a century of Jim Crow, a resistant and segregationist state, and a federal government slow to fully embrace equality. By organizing and marching bravely in the face of intimidation, violence, arrest and even murder, these change-makers achieved one of the most significant victories of the civil rights era.

The 40-minute film is recommended for students in grades 6 to 12.

The Viewer's Guide supports classroom viewing of *Selma* with background information, discussion questions and lessons. In *Do Something!*, a culminating activity, students are encouraged to get involved locally to promote voting and voter registration.

For more information and updates,  
visit [tolerance.org/selma-bridge-to-ballot](https://tolerance.org/selma-bridge-to-ballot).  
Send feedback and ideas to [editor@tolerance.org](mailto:editor@tolerance.org).

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## How to Use This Guide

*Selma: The Bridge to the Ballot* is a versatile film that can be used in a variety of courses to spark conversations about civil rights, activism, the proper use of government power and the role of the citizen.

Because we expect that teachers will use the film in many different ways—and will have different amounts of time to spend with it—we’ve made this guide as flexible as possible.

You can introduce the film to students using the synopsis; the lists of people, groups and places in the film; or the timeline of events, all provided in Part One of this guide.

Feel uneasy about talking about racial issues? See the guidance we offer in Part Two.

Want to do an in-depth study of African-American voting rights, from Reconstruction through the present? Don’t miss the readings in Part Three.

But if your time is short and you want to focus on the film itself, you’ll find some straightforward viewing questions in Part Four. You’ll also find a variety of strategies to foster critical viewing and help students analyze what it takes to make change happen.

Use any combination of these strategies to deepen student understanding of the events and issues raised by the film. Consider breaking into “home” and “expert” groups using a jigsaw approach to increase student engagement and develop appreciation of the complex nature of the civil rights movement.

To help students connect their learning to current topics, use the materials in Part Five to explore voting issues today, particularly in their own state.

We’ve been inspired by the students in this film, and we hope it inspires your students to care about voting and to see a place for themselves in the voting rights picture. That’s why we’ve included a culminating project called Do Something! We hope that, no matter how little time you have, you’ll find a way to engage students with this civic action project.

Whether viewing the film with students or in a community setting, and regardless of which materials in the guide you use, these are some key ideas you’ll want to consider and discuss.

### Essential Questions

Begin by engaging students with these essential questions for discussion or thought:

- Does voting matter? Why were black citizens throughout the South ready to risk their lives to secure their right to vote? Why do so few people today exercise that right?
- Can students make a difference? Why did students join the movement in Selma, and why were adults so hesitant?
- What does it take to end deeply ingrained injustice?

### **Objectives**

- Students will be able to describe the legal and extra-legal obstacles black citizens faced in attempting to vote.
- Students will be able to explain the significance of the right to vote.
- Students will be able to identify the organized efforts used to achieve passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.
- Students will be able to describe elements used in nonviolent movements.
- Students will understand that even young people have the power to make a difference in the world.

### **Time and Materials**

- *Selma: The Bridge to the Ballot*
- Viewer's Guide readings and handouts for each student or for use in groups
- Two or more class periods, depending on the extent of the Do Something! activity

## PART ONE

## About the Film and the Selma-to-Montgomery March

*Selma: The Bridge to the Ballot* is the story of a courageous group of Alabama students and teachers who, along with other activists, fought a nonviolent battle to win voting rights for African Americans in the South. Standing in their way: a century of Jim Crow, a resistant and segregationist state, and a federal government slow to fully embrace equality. By organizing and marching bravely in the face of intimidation, violence, arrest and even murder, these change-makers achieved one of the most significant victories of the civil rights era.

The story of the Selma-to-Montgomery march, like all stories in the civil rights movement, is much more than an isolated chapter in our history. The voting rights movement illustrates how citizens in our democracy can use the rights guaranteed them in the First Amendment to contest injustice. It shows the power of activism and nonviolence to disrupt oppressive systems. And it shows that the energy and momentum for social change often comes from the youngest among us.

Despite the passage in 1870 of the 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment, which granted African-American men the right to vote, few black citizens could exercise that right 75 years later. Jim Crow laws set literacy tests and poll taxes into place as obstacles. Restrictive rules and procedures reinforced the barriers. In Selma, the voter registration office was open only two days a month, and would-be voters had to supply the name of an already-registered voter to vouch for them. Economic power was a further barrier to registration. White employers and landowners were likely to punish black citizens who dared to register by firing them or throwing them off the farms they worked on as sharecroppers. Custom provided the cement that made the combined obstacles all but impenetrable.

And yet, in the face of all these obstacles, the least powerful people in Selma society—the black, the young, the disenfranchised—joined together and used nonviolent means to break the system open and gain the right to participate fully in civic life.

As you and your students watch the film and talk about it, consider the questions below, and remember that many of them are still relevant today.

- How did people in power use laws, custom and procedures to maintain a status quo that favored them? What are some examples of people in power using these tactics today?
- Why was nonviolent action so effective, and what unique leverage does nonviolent resistance have in the face of power and force?
- What kinds of planning, organizing and communication are required to take action and bring about change? Is participating in a demonstration enough?

- How did individuals further the movement? How did organized groups further the movement?
- Does voting still matter? If so, why do so few people exercise the right to vote?
- What role did the media—mainly newspapers and television—play in bringing about awareness and public support for change in the South?
- Why did students join the movement when so many adults hesitated?
- What parallels exist between events of the early 1960s and events today?
- What effect did the civil rights movement have on racial discrimination and injustice? In what ways was it successful? In what ways do racial discrimination and injustice still exist?

## The Groups

The **Dallas County Voters League**, a local group led mainly by Selma teachers, worked to encourage black citizens to register to vote and held classes to prepare them for the literacy and civics tests.

The **Ku Klux Klan** first emerged during Reconstruction as a vigilante group that used horrific violence to intimidate and control Southern blacks. The white supremacist group arose again during the 1950s and 1960s. Members used violence—including bombings and murder—in a campaign of terror against supporters of the civil rights movement.

The **Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)** organized students to take direct action such as sit-ins, freedom rides and voter registration drives to bring an end to segregation. A major civil rights organization, SNCC operated throughout the South and enjoyed support from people across the country.

The **Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC)**, whose first president was Martin Luther King Jr., grew out of the successful Montgomery Bus Boycott. The group worked to support and direct opposition to segregation by collaborating closely with Christian churches.

The **White Citizens' Council** consisted of white leaders (e.g., bankers, newspaper editors, politicians and business owners) who banded together throughout the South to resist desegregation after the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. Called the “uptown Klan” by Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, the members used their economic and political power to enforce white supremacy and oppose integration under the slogan “Never!”



## The People

Teenagers take center stage in *Selma: The Bridge to the Ballot*. But they are not alone: local residents, state and federal officials, and people across the nation all play a part in this story.

**Amelia Boynton**, civil rights activist, leader of Dallas County Voters League (DCVL)

**Avery Williams**, Selma student

**Bernard Lafayette**, youth organizer with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)

**Bettie Mae Fikes**, Selma student

**C.T. Vivian**, minister, civil rights activist, member of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC)

**Charles Bonner**, Selma student

**Charles Mauldin**, Selma student, president of the Dallas County Youth Voter's League

**Clark Olsen**, minister from Berkeley, California

**Cleo Hobbs**, Selma student

**Diane Nash**, civil rights activist, a founder of SNCC

**Frank M. Johnson Jr.**, U.S. District Court Judge

**Frederick D. Reese**, Selma teacher, president of the Black Teachers' Association, president of the DCVL

**George Wallace**, governor of Alabama

**Hazel Chatmon**, Selma student

**Henry Allen**, Selma student

**Hosea Williams**, civil rights activist with the SCLC

**James Bevel**, civil rights activist with the SCLC

**James Hare**, Alabama Circuit Court judge

**James Reeb**, minister from Boston, Massachusetts

**James Orange**, civil rights activist with the SCLC

**Jim Clark**, sheriff of Dallas County

**Jimmie Lee Jackson**, church deacon from Marion, Alabama

**Joanne Blackmon**, Selma student

**John Cloud**, leader of the Alabama State Troopers

**John Lewis**, civil rights activist, chair of SNCC

**Joseph T. Smitherman**, mayor of Selma

**Lawrence Huggins**, Selma football coach and teacher

**Lynda Blackmon**, Selma student

**Lyndon B. Johnson**, president of the United States

**Margaret Moore**, Selma teacher and member of DCVL

**Martin Luther King Jr.**, leader of the SCLC

**Sarah Craig**, Selma teacher

**Sheyann Webb**, Selma elementary student

**Terry Shaw**, Selma student

**Walter Turner**, clerk to Judge Johnson

**Willie Robinson**, Selma student

**Wilson Baker**, Selma director of public safety

## The Places

**16th Street Baptist Church.** A church in Birmingham, Alabama, that served as a hub of activity during mass anti-segregation demonstrations in 1963, including the Birmingham Children's Crusade. In September of that year, members of the Ku Klux Klan planted a bomb in the basement, killing four girls, Addie Mae Collins, Cynthia Wesley, Carole Robertson and Denise McNair.

**Black Belt.** The rich soil of the Black Belt drew cotton planters—and their enslaved workforce—to the region before the Civil War. After the war and into the 20th century, the sharecropping system that replaced the plantation system kept the largely black population mired in poverty.

**Brown Chapel.** One of the Selma churches that allowed activists to hold mass meetings during the voting rights campaign, including rallies led by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

**Dallas County Courthouse.** The site of the registrar’s office and the only place where residents of Dallas County could register to vote on one of the two days each month it was open.

**Edmund Pettus Bridge.** A bridge that crosses the Alabama River, over which U.S. Highway 80 runs, connecting Selma to Montgomery.

**George Washington Carver Homes.** A public housing project in Selma for many black residents, the Carver Homes became a staging area for demonstrations.

**Good Samaritan Hospital.** This Catholic facility was Selma’s black hospital. Jimmie Lee Jackson died there after being shot. Doctors at the hospital also treated people injured on Bloody Sunday.

**Marion, Alabama.** Located in the Black Belt, the county seat for Perry County had its own groups working for voting rights.

**Montgomery, Alabama.** Located 54 miles east of Selma, the capital city was where Governor George Wallace lived and worked.

**R.B. Hudson High School.** In Selma’s segregated school system, R.B. Hudson was the black high school attended by many of the student activists.

**River Road.** On February 10, 1965, Sheriff Jim Clark’s officers violently forced young demonstrators down this road for two miles to stop them from protesting.

**Selma, Alabama.** Located in the middle of Alabama’s Black Belt, this was the largest city in Dallas County and also the county seat.

**U.S. Highway 80.** The road connecting Selma to Montgomery and the route for the 54-mile Selma-to-Montgomery March.

### The Campsites

**David Hall Farm.** The March 21 campsite, located seven miles from Selma.

**Rosie Steele Farm.** The March 22 campsite, located 23 miles from Selma.

**Robert Gardner Farm.** The March 23 campsite, located 34 miles from Selma.

**City of St. Jude.** The March 24 campsite, located 50 miles from Selma. St. Jude was also the location for the “Stars for Freedom” rally.

## The Setting

1963, Selma, Alabama

Jim Crow has ruled here for over 70 years. Despite some notable judicial and legal victories, segregation remains deeply embedded throughout the small towns and cities of the South. Selma, Alabama, is one such place.

In Selma, as in other communities, people are organizing. The Dallas County Voters League (DCVL) encourages black citizens to register to vote, but fear keeps most would-be registrants at home. The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) has come to town, organizing high school students, and soon the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) will arrive. Selma will no longer be a little-known city in Alabama. As the nation watches, it will become a key battleground in the struggle for equality.

But why Selma? Black and white students still attend separate schools and most public places remain segregated even after the Civil Rights Act of 1964 is passed. Selma has a locally organized civil rights movement, led largely by the DCVL; a history of student demonstrations, thanks to SNCC; and the city's black leaders are ready to welcome outside assistance from the SCLC. Most importantly, the hard-line tactics of Dallas County Sheriff Jim Clark guarantee arrests that will attract the national spotlight.

## The Events

### 1963

- |                               |                                                                                                                                                                       |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>February</b>               | Bernard Lafayette, from SNCC, arrives in Selma to organize youth.                                                                                                     |
| <b>September</b>              | Members of the Ku Klux Klan bomb Birmingham's 16th Street Baptist Church, killing four girls.                                                                         |
| <b>September/<br/>October</b> | Teens in Selma react to the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church by protesting at Carter's Drug Store. Willie Robinson is beaten and four students are arrested. |
| <b>October 7</b>              | Freedom Day—an all-out effort to register Selma voters—leads to arrests and brutal use of force by Sheriff Jim Clark.                                                 |
| <b>Late 1963</b>              | In response to the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing, Diane Nash, James Bevel and James Orange plan the Alabama Project, a voting rights campaign.                   |

### 1964

- |                  |                                                                                                                                                                |
|------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>July 2</b>    | President Lyndon B. Johnson signs the Civil Rights Act of 1964 into law.                                                                                       |
| <b>July 9</b>    | Alabama State Circuit Court Judge James Hare issues an injunction that forbids three or more people from publicly meeting in Selma in support of civil rights. |
| <b>Late 1964</b> | The DCVL invites the SCLC and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to come to Selma to support voting rights.                                                            |

**1965**

- January 2** Over 700 people defy the Hare injunction by attending a mass meeting at Brown Chapel, where Dr. King speaks.
- January 18** Three hundred people, half of them high school students, attend a morning song service. Marches begin when the voter registration office opens.
- January 19** Sheriff Clark beats and arrests Amelia Boynton, a founder of the DCVL and a key Selma organizer.
- January 19-21** Activists, including children, continue to march despite the sheriff's tactics, such as the use of cattle prods.
- January 22** More than 100 black teachers join the movement, marching from Clark Elementary School to the Selma courthouse. After being beaten back by club-wielding officers, they return to Brown Chapel, where 300 students greet them jubilantly.
- January 25-29** Every day, hundreds of black voter registration applicants wait at the courthouse; mass arrests follow.
- Alabama Governor George Wallace dispatches 50 state troopers to reinforce Sheriff Clark's men.
- February 1** Dr. King and Ralph Abernathy, who has been helping King organize nonviolent protest campaigns since 1955, lead an adult march from Brown Chapel to the Selma courthouse. Both are arrested.
- February 2-3** More than 2,000 civil rights protesters have been arrested in Selma since January 18.
- In cities across the country, activists organize demonstrations and sit-ins in support of those fighting for civil rights in Selma.
- February 4** President Johnson issues a statement in support of voting rights.
- February 5** C.T. Vivian—a member of the SCLC's executive staff—leads a group of adult activists to the courthouse; they are arrested.
- Following the adults' arrests, 450 students approach the courthouse and are arrested as well. In Dallas and Perry counties, 3,850 civil rights activists have been arrested to date.
- Dr. King and Ralph Abernathy are released on bail.
- February 9** Dr. King meets with President Johnson, Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey and Attorney General Nicholas B. Katzenbach in Washington, D.C. President Johnson promises voting legislation soon.

- February 10** With leaders in jail, students have begun self-organizing. One hundred and sixty protest at the courthouse where Sheriff Clark's men, using batons and cattle prods, force the young marchers out of town and down isolated country roads.
- February 15** Voter registration offices are open for the last time in February; 1,500 activists participate in the largest march to date in Selma.
- February 18** In the nearby city of Marion, state troopers join Sheriff Clark's men and swarm the town. They arrest James Orange for "contributing to the delinquency of minors" by encouraging students to march and sing freedom songs.
- Civil rights supporters plan a short nighttime march to sing to Orange in jail. Police and state troopers attack and pursue fleeing marchers, including Jimmie Lee Jackson, into Mack's Café.
- Jackson is shot by state trooper Jim Fowler and brought to Good Samaritan Hospital in Selma.
- February 26** Jimmie Lee Jackson dies in Selma.
- March 3** R.B. Hudson High School students boycott classes to attend Jimmie Lee Jackson's funeral service. Dr. King's sermon points at police brutality and the timidity of the federal government.
- Dr. King announces the plan to bring the issue to Governor Wallace's doorstep with a march from Selma to Montgomery.
- Governor Wallace orders state troopers to prevent the march.
- March 6** Concerned White Citizens of Alabama, a group led by Reverend Joseph Ellwanger of Birmingham, marches in support of civil rights, the first pro-civil rights action taken by white activists in the area.
- March 7** Over 600 protesters leave Brown Chapel and cross the Edmund Pettus Bridge. At the far side, they are met by 50 riot-gearred state troopers on horseback, along with Sheriff Clark's deputies and several dozen of his "posse."
- As the marchers kneel to pray, the troopers charge into the crowd, clubbing people and firing tear gas. Nationwide coverage of what becomes known as Bloody Sunday focuses the eyes of the nation—and Washington, D.C.—on Selma.
- Dr. King issues a nationwide call for people of conscience to come to Selma and march on March 9.

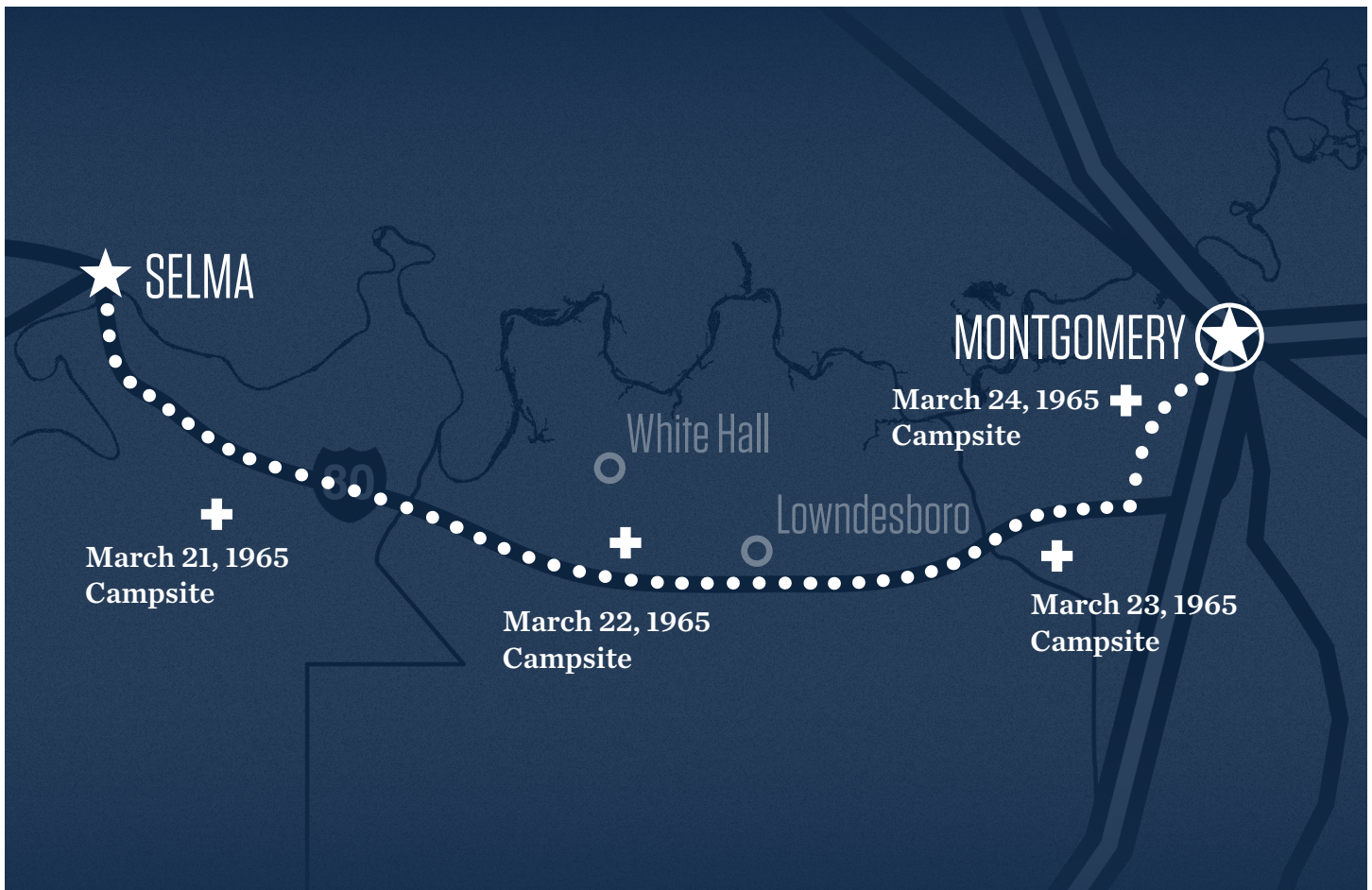
- March 8** SCLC lawyers file a motion before U.S. District Court Judge Frank Johnson in Montgomery to prevent the state of Alabama from blocking the march.
- SNCC, the DCVL and the SCLC put pressure on the U.S. Department of Justice and the White House to protect the march and take action on a voting rights bill with teeth. Supporters around the country demonstrate in support of the Selma activists.
- In Selma, thousands of activists flood Brown Chapel. State troopers mass in the city as well.
- March 9** Judge Johnson has issued an injunction against the march, which Dr. King decides to obey. Dr. King leads 2,000 people to the Edmund Pettus Bridge, kneels to pray, and turns the march around.
- That night, three ministers who have traveled to Selma to support the movement are attacked. Minister James Reeb is the most seriously injured.
- March 10** News of the attack on James Reeb prompts more voting rights demonstrations around the country. Pressure mounts on Washington, D.C.
- Selma police surround the George Washington Carver Homes to contain marchers. Protesters dub the police line the “Berlin Wall.”
- Judge Johnson begins hearings to decide whether to allow the march.
- March 11** James Reeb dies.
- March 15** President Johnson addresses the nation and a joint session of Congress to propose a sweeping voting rights act.
- March 17** Judge Johnson rules in favor of the marchers and orders Governor Wallace to protect the march to the capital.
- March 21** Thousands of marchers depart from Brown Chapel in Selma headed for Montgomery and planning to stop at campsites along the way.
- March 25** In the final four miles of the march, the group swells to 25,000 people. Montgomery is eerily quiet: Governor Wallace has urged white people to stay home, proclaiming a “danger holiday” for the state’s white female employees.
- Dr. King delivers his “Our God Is Marching On” address.
- Later that night, Viola Liuzzo, a white civil rights activist, is killed by members of the Ku Klux Klan after leaving the protest.

**August 6**

President Johnson signs the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The Act forbids literacy tests; empowers the U.S. Department of Justice and federal courts to monitor problem jurisdictions; and, most importantly, requires jurisdictions with a history of discrimination to receive federal approval before they can make any changes in voting procedures or requirements.

**December**

The number of registered black voters in Dallas County has risen from 383 before passage of the Voting Rights Act to about 9,000—slightly more than half the black voting age population. Across the South, the number of black voters rises to approximately 250,000 by the end of the year.



## PART TWO

## Preparing to Teach with *Selma: The Bridge to the Ballot*

*Selma: The Bridge to the Ballot*, which is about events that took place in 1965, raises issues that remain relevant today: the use of the n-word, the misuse of police power, the power of symbols to intimidate, the effectiveness of popular movements.

Teaching about the civil rights movement means being prepared to talk about race and racism, not simply as remnants of a long-gone past, but as real forces in the world today.

Race is a social construct, not a biological given. Still, race matters. It shapes our experiences and has real impacts, from the smallest interpersonal interaction to the largest institutional arrangements. Many teachers believe that ignoring race—adopting a colorblind stance—is the best way to overcome its negative power. Yet it’s important for teachers to examine the ways that race influences their classrooms every day. Stanford Professor of Education Linda Darling-Hammond has argued that, in schools, teachers and students routinely make assumptions about each other on the basis of race. “Those are all assumptions that can be tested, debunked and reframed,” she says, “but you can’t get there without understanding that race is part of the context.”

Certainly, we must talk about race to help students understand the civil rights movement. Learning works through a process of assimilating new knowledge into existing beliefs about the world. Unexplored and unacknowledged background ideas or assumptions too easily create emotional obstacles to student learning. This is particularly true when teaching about race and racism. As Spelman College President Beverly Daniel Tatum writes: “If not addressed, these emotional responses can result in student resistance to oppression-related content areas. Such resistance can ultimately interfere with the cognitive understanding and mastery of the material. This resistance and potential interference is particularly common when specifically addressing issues of race and racism.” If we do not talk about race and racism when we talk about the civil rights movement, we deprive students of the opportunity to understand much of American history.

Talking about race and racism means reaching outside the context of the civil rights movement. We do students a disservice if we encourage them to think that racism is a remnant of a distant historical era. In addition, we risk losing students of color who know all too well the continued effects of race and racism.

Many teachers, wanting to avoid discomfort or conflict, avoid open conversations about race in their classrooms. These reasonable concerns only underscore how important it is to find ways to make the classroom a safe space in which to talk about race and ethnicity.

Adapted from *The March Continues: Five Essential Practices for Teaching the Civil Rights Movement*



It is not easy to talk about race. Setting clear guidelines for discussion is an essential first step. Involve students in this process by asking them what kinds of guidelines they need to feel safe expressing their ideas. Remember that conversations about race are not only about color, but also about whiteness. Too often, teachers discuss race without making white privilege visible and subject to investigation; in the context of the civil rights movement, this can make the struggle difficult to understand and can diminish the heroism of white allies who “crossed lines” in solidarity with black activists.

Teaching the civil rights movement provides a relevant and historically appropriate opportunity to talk openly with students about the ways discrimination and privilege have shaped and continue to shape American society. Teachers who choose to talk about race in the classroom will be rewarded with students who are more fully engaged and who gain a deeper understanding of the civil rights movement and its context.

### **Keep in Mind**

- Acknowledge the importance of race in your students’ lives.
- Dispel ideas about a biological basis for race.
- Brush up on the history of race as a social construct used as a means of social control.
- Create a safe environment with clear communication guidelines.
- Identify common roadblocks to productive discussion.
- Recognize that disparities exist but need not persist.
- Speak from your own experience.
- Create opportunities for students to speak from their own experience.

### **Tools for Teachers**

#### *Start with yourself.*

Before starting conversations with your students about race and ethnicity, it’s good to begin by reflecting on your own identity using a tool like Teaching Tolerance’s “Reflection Activity.”

#### *Read about it.*

Teaching Tolerance offers a number of articles that grapple with this subject. Try “Race Talk When Diversity Equals One,” “It’s Still Good to Talk About Race,” “It’s Never Too Early to Talk About Race” and “Talking Race.”

#### *Go deeper.*

Read a book like *Talking Race in the Classroom* by Jane Bolgatz. Spend some time with Teaching Tolerance’s online professional development tools about culture in the classroom. Talk with other teachers to see how they talk about race.

Adapted from *The March Continues: Five Essential Practices for Teaching the Civil Rights Movement*

**PART THREE**

## Before Viewing

The events depicted in *Selma: The Bridge to the Ballot* are part of a larger history of oppression and resistance that can be traced from slavery and emancipation through Reconstruction and Jim Crow. This section provides students some exposure to this historical context—context that will be especially useful to those viewing the film as part of a history course.

### **African Americans Get the Vote—or Do They?**

After the Civil War, Congress passed and the required number of states ratified three changes to the Constitution: the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments. Collectively, these have become known as the Reconstruction Amendments because they were made into law during the post-Civil War period called the Reconstruction. These amendments served two main purposes: to establish the terms under which the seceded states of the Confederacy would return to the Union, and to extend freedom and full citizenship to the African Americans who had been held in slavery.

On paper, these amendments promised full equality.

#### *Amendment XIII*

*Section 1. Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.*

*Section 2. Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.*

*Ratified December 6, 1865*

The 13th Amendment abolished, forever, the system of chattel slavery that had existed in the United States and that had previously been allowed under the Constitution. Upon taking effect, enslaved persons became freed people, but what that meant exactly was unclear. Were they citizens? Did they have the same freedoms as other Americans? Could they vote?

#### *Amendment XIV*

*Section 1. All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.*

*Ratified July 9, 1868*

The 14th Amendment settled the question of citizenship for freed African Americans: if they were born in the United States, they were “natural-born” citizens. States were forbid-

den to abridge their “privileges and immunities”—widely understood to include the right to vote. And, with the “due process” and “equal protection” clauses, freed African Americans were promised legal treatment equal to everyone else.

Three other sections of the amendment cleared up other post-war matters by negating the three-fifths clause of the Constitution and allowing formerly slave-holding states to have representation in Congress proportional to the full population of the state. States that denied the vote to the newly freed black men, however, would not enjoy the increased number of representatives. Finally, the amendment disqualified ex-Confederates from holding office and repudiated the Confederate debt.

The right to vote is implied in the 14th Amendment, but it is not stated explicitly.

#### *Amendment XV*

*Section 1. The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.*

*Section 2. The Congress shall have the power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.*

*Ratified February 3, 1870*

Finally, with the addition of the 15th Amendment, all questions about the rights of freedmen were clarified. Race, color or previous enslavement could not be used by states to deprive any male over the age of 21 the right to vote.

#### **Focus Questions**

What does each amendment say?

How does each amendment change the Constitution?

Why was each amendment enacted?

Why is each important? What rights does each guarantee to African Americans?

What provisions does each amendment make for enforcement of its guarantees?

Who has the power to enforce the amendment? How?

## Broken Promises

The Reconstruction amendments brought a brief glimpse of freedom. Within five years of the end of the Civil War, four million people were no longer enslaved, were affirmed as citizens and were guaranteed the right to vote.

In many Southern states, black men were elected to high office, and black legislators helped write new state constitutions. Fourteen African Americans served in the U.S. House of Representatives between 1870 and 1876.

But the promise of full political equality was short-lived. White supremacists and ex-Confederates used a combination of means to re-establish their power in the South. By the mid-1870s, the federal government lost interest in rebuilding the South or protecting the rights of the former slaves. In 1877, Reconstruction was effectively over and the reforms that it had brought to the South began to erode.

Black people lost the right to travel freely, to use public transportation or to attend integrated schools. Most importantly, black men lost the right to vote.

The Ku Klux Klan, formed by Confederate veterans, used terrorism and violence to maintain white supremacy. Between 1885 and 1901 alone, more than 2,000 African Americans were lynched by Klan members or their affiliates.

By the early 20th century, a brutal and degrading system of segregation had taken root throughout the South. “Jim Crow” laws required black people to use separate—and inferior—facilities in every aspect of life.

The Supreme Court approved Jim Crow segregation in the 1896 case of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, when it ruled that separate facilities were legal as long as they were equal. The ruling gave the green light to Southern legislatures to enact laws and uphold policies to enforce white supremacy. In practice, separate was never equal.

These Southern legislatures also created a system of laws that made it virtually impossible for black men—and later, women—to vote. More than that, the informal system of white supremacy made it dangerous to try.

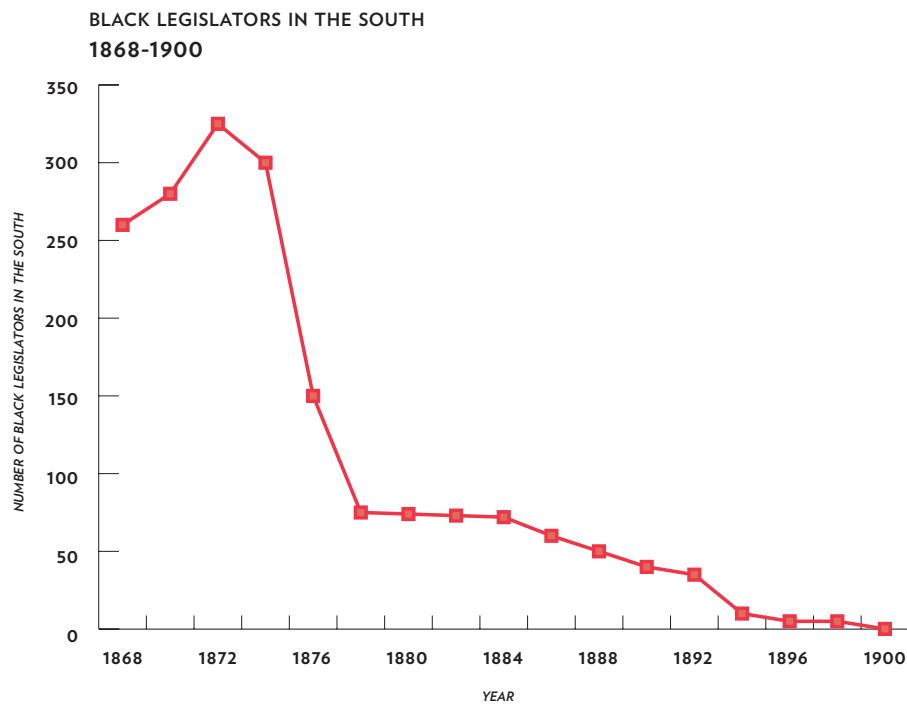
For most black people in the South, voting was dangerous business. Elaborate regulations limited black voting, and anyone who tried to defy the system was punished, often brutally.

Attacks on black voters were common, but they were not the only tactic used to keep African Americans away from the polls. Southern legislatures had passed laws requiring voters to pay poll taxes, and these kept the rural poor, black and white, disenfranchised. White voters whose ancestors had voted prior to the Civil War were exempted from the literacy and civics tests that black would-be voters were required to take. Registrars applied the tests arbitrarily and unequally, and were not required to explain why someone attempting to register might be rejected.

Adapted from *Free at Last: A History of the Civil Rights Movement and those Who Died in the Struggle*

In Dallas County, Alabama, local officials made it inconvenient and difficult to register to vote. The office was open only during business hours on the first and third Monday of each month. New registrants needed someone already registered to vouch for them, and registered voters were limited in the number of people for whom they could vouch each year.

Economic weapons were also used against black voters; just trying to register could mean losing a job, having a loan called in or being evicted from a home. In Selma, employees of a local nursing home were fired in 1963 for trying to register to vote. In many towns, newspapers printed the names of all voter applicants, which made the job of intimidation even easier.



### Focus Questions

The 15th Amendment says that voting could not be restricted because of race. How did Southern states prevent African Americans from exercising their right to vote?

When did the number of black legislators reach its peak? Based on what you've learned about U.S. history, can you explain the trend depicted in the graph?

When did the number of black legislators begin to fall? What might account for that decrease?

Make a prediction for the data for the next ten years after the last date on the chart. Explain your prediction.

Adapted from *Free at Last: A History of the Civil Rights Movement and those Who Died in the Struggle*

**PART FOUR**

## During Viewing

Use the materials and instructional strategies in Part Four to help students directly engage with the people and events documented in *Selma: The Bridge to the Ballot*.

### Why Selma?

*1963, Selma, Alabama*

Jim Crow has ruled here for over 70 years. Despite some notable judicial and legal victories, segregation remains deeply embedded throughout the small towns and cities of the South. Selma, Alabama, is one such place.

In Selma, as in other communities, people are organizing. The Dallas County Voters League (DCVL) encourages black citizens to register to vote, but fear keeps most would-be registrants at home. The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) has come to town, organizing high school students, and soon the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) will arrive. Selma will no longer be a little-known city in Alabama. As the nation watches, it will become a key battleground in the struggle for equality.

But why Selma? Black and white students still attend separate schools, and most public places remain segregated even after the Civil Rights Act of 1964 is passed. Selma has a locally organized civil rights movement, led largely by the DCVL; a history of student demonstrations, thanks to SNCC; and the city's black leaders are ready to welcome outside assistance from the SCLC. Most importantly, the hard-line tactics of Dallas County Sheriff Jim Clark guarantee arrests that will attract the national spotlight.

### What's Happening?

Use these questions to help keep track of what's happening in the film.

#### Act I (00:00–11:51)

1. What event inspired the voting rights campaign in Alabama?
2. Why were students better able than adults to organize and protest?
3. What obstacles kept most black citizens from being able to vote?
4. How did student activists oppose segregation and injustice in Selma? What risks did they take?
5. How did the segregationist sheriff and judge respond to the demonstrations?

#### Act II (11:52–29:11)

1. Why did Dr. King come to Selma?
2. Why did demonstrators march to the courthouse every day?
3. What was the significance of the teachers joining the protest? What risks did they take?
4. How did the death of Jimmie Lee Jackson affect the campaign?

5. What happened in Selma after Bloody Sunday made national news?

**Act III (29:12–39:10)**

1. Why did the marchers turn around the second time they gathered at Edmund Pettus Bridge?
2. Why were ministers from all over the country in Selma? What risks did they take?
3. What was the significance of the barricade around the George Washington Carver Homes?
4. Why was President Johnson’s use of the phrase “we shall overcome” meaningful to marchers?
5. What was the immediate effect of the passage of the Voting Rights Act?

**Strategy 1: How Does it All Fit Together?**

Another way to look at *Selma: The Bridge to the Ballot* is to consider the themes or “enduring understandings” that underpin the film. Learn about the people, places and events in the film using the synopsis and timeline in Part One of the guide, and then use the questions below each enduring understanding to prepare for a discussion.

**ENDURING UNDERSTANDING 1****Nonviolent tactics are significant to the success of social movements.**

- What are some examples of nonviolent strategies employed during the voting rights movement?
- What political arguments support a nonviolent strategy?
- What philosophical arguments support a nonviolent strategy?
- What are some of the challenges to and arguments against nonviolence?
- How might the voting rights movement have been different if nonviolence had not been a primary tactic?

What do I know about this statement before viewing?	What do I want to learn about this statement from the film?	What did I learn about this statement from viewing the film? (Record specific evidence from the film.)
What do I still want to know?		



**ENDURING UNDERSTANDING 2****Location is significant to the success of social movements.**

- What were some differences in Selma between life for African Americans and life for whites?
- What local and state events and conditions led to protests in Selma?
- What was happening in the South and throughout the country leading up to the protests in Selma?
- Why might some say Selma was the perfect place for a voting rights showdown?
- Describe how the events in and around Selma led to the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

What do I know about this statement before viewing?	What do I want to learn about this statement from the film?	What did I learn about this statement from viewing the film? (Record specific evidence from the film.)
What do I still want to know?		

**ENDURING UNDERSTANDING 3**

**Youth participation is significant to the success of social movements.**

- In what ways did young people participate in the voting rights movement?
- Why did young people participate in the voting rights movement?
- What risks did young people take in participating in the voting rights movement? What support did they have?
- Why were adults so hesitant to participate in the voting rights movement? How did youths influence the beliefs and behaviors of adults in Selma?
- What is an issue today that you would march for?

What do I know about this statement before viewing?	What do I want to learn about this statement from the film?	What did I learn about this statement from viewing the film? (Record specific evidence from the film.)
<p><b>What do I still want to know?</b></p>		

**ENDURING UNDERSTANDING 4**

**Strategic organizing methods are significant to the success of social movements.**

- What leaders and groups were involved in the voting rights movement in Selma?
- What methods did these leaders and groups use to organize people in Selma?
- What leaders and groups posed obstacles to the voting rights movement?
- What methods did opposition groups use to prevent African Americans from voting?
- What tactics did civil rights activists use to resist the opposition?

What do I know about this statement before viewing?	What do I want to learn about this statement from the film?	What did I learn about this statement from viewing the film? (Record specific evidence from the film.)
<p><b>What do I still want to know?</b></p>		

**ENDURING UNDERSTANDING 5****Voting is fundamental to democracy.**

- Who had the legal right to vote in 1965? Who was able to exercise that right?
- How were most African Americans in Selma prevented from voting until 1965?
- Why were black citizens throughout the South ready to risk their lives to secure their right to vote?
- In your view, what does it mean to be an active and engaged citizen?  
What does it look like?
- Why do people choose to vote or not to vote?

What do I know about this statement before viewing?	What do I want to learn about this statement from the film?	What did I learn about this statement from viewing the film? (Record specific evidence from the film.)
What do I still want to know?		

**Strategy 2: Can We Ever Have a Complete Picture?**

Too often, stories of the civil rights movement spotlight one or two important leaders and key events. But the real story of the movement is more complicated, involving many leaders and many events. Even a single event, like the Selma voting rights movement, had many moving parts.

After becoming familiar with the people, places and events of Selma using materials in Part One, use the graphic organizer below to identify other important elements of the story documented in *Selma: The Bridge to the Ballot*. Record details for each category as you watch. Continue adding details while you discuss the voting rights movement in class.

STRATEGY 2	
LEADERS	
GROUPS	
EVENTS	
HISTORICAL CONTEXT	
OPPOSITION	
TACTICS	

**Strategy 3: Power to the People**

Sometimes it seems that courageous and charismatic leaders like Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks single-handedly achieved the gains of the civil rights movement. The truth, though, is that the movement involved many people, each of whom took risks and demonstrated courage. And George Wallace, governor of Alabama, wasn't the only opponent. Large numbers of people opposed change.

Use this graphic organizer to identify who's who—names, roles, positions of participants—as you watch the film.

STRATEGY 3	STUDENTS	TEACHERS	LOCAL (SELMA)	STATE/NATIONAL
SUPPORTER OF THE MOVEMENT				
OPPONENT OF THE MOVEMENT				

**Strategy 4: Let's Get Organized!**

Action takes hard work, often out of the spotlight. Without activist organizations keeping people informed, working out strategies and logistics, and going door-to-door, very little gets accomplished.

Action takes courage, too. James L. Farmer Jr., a civil rights activist and founder of the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE), said, “Anyone who said he wasn’t afraid during the civil rights movement was either a liar or without imagination. I was scared all the time. My hands didn’t shake, but inside I was shaking.”

Groups in social movements share goals, tactics and often dangers, but—by bringing people together—they can help overcome the inner shaking.

In Selma, three groups—the Dallas County Voters League (DCVL), the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)—all worked to gain the vote. Who they were, and how they planned to achieve success, differed.

Use this graphic organizer to look at each organization in terms of who they were, what they sought to achieve, the tactics they used and the risks they faced.

GROUPS AT WORK IN THE VOTING RIGHTS MOVEMENT			
	DCVL	SCLC	SNCC
WHO			
GOALS			
TACTICS			
DANGERS			

**PART FIVE**

## After Viewing

### The Voting Rights Act of 1965

#### Obstacles Cleared

In spite of the fact that the 15th Amendment was intended to guarantee African-American men the right to vote, states—particularly Southern states—had found ways to circumvent the law. Poll taxes, grandfather clauses, literacy and civics tests, as well as violence, made it virtually impossible for many black Americans to exercise their right to vote. Civil rights activists had challenged these restrictions in court, but in 1965, Congress determined that these case-by-case lawsuits were ineffective.

*Selma: The Bridge to the Ballot* ends with news of the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which includes several key points.

- No requirement or procedure may be used to deny the vote to any citizen of the United States based on race.
- No “test” (e.g., literacy or civics tests) or “device” (e.g., grandfather clause) may be used as a prerequisite for voting.
- States and localities that most severely restricted voting rights before this 1965 law will now require special attention. The Voting Rights Act identified these as states that used any “test or device” to limit voting based on race or color on November 1, 1964, or places where less than 50 percent of people of voting age were registered to vote on November 1, 1964.
- When one of the states or localities requiring special attention wants to change voter qualifications or voting procedures, it needs court approval to do so.
- Federal examiners and observers may, at the request of the U.S. attorney general, oversee voter registration, voting and vote-counting sites.

#### Focus Questions

What barriers faced by residents of Dallas County did the Voting Rights Act of 1965 ban?

What provisions in the legislation ensured that the Act would remain effective over time?

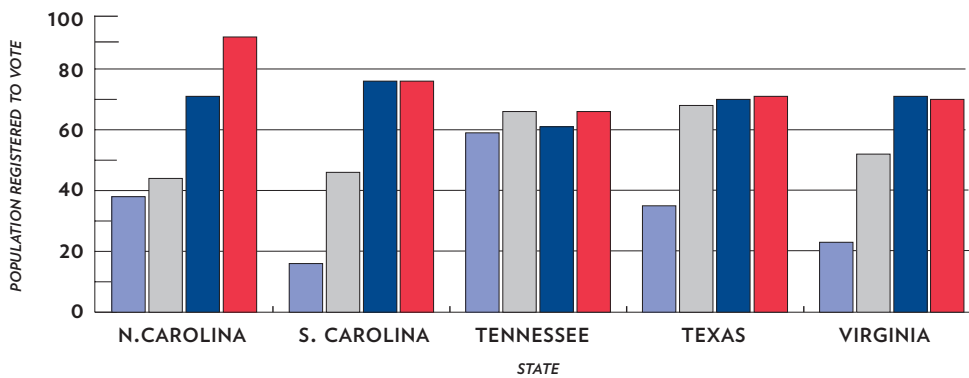
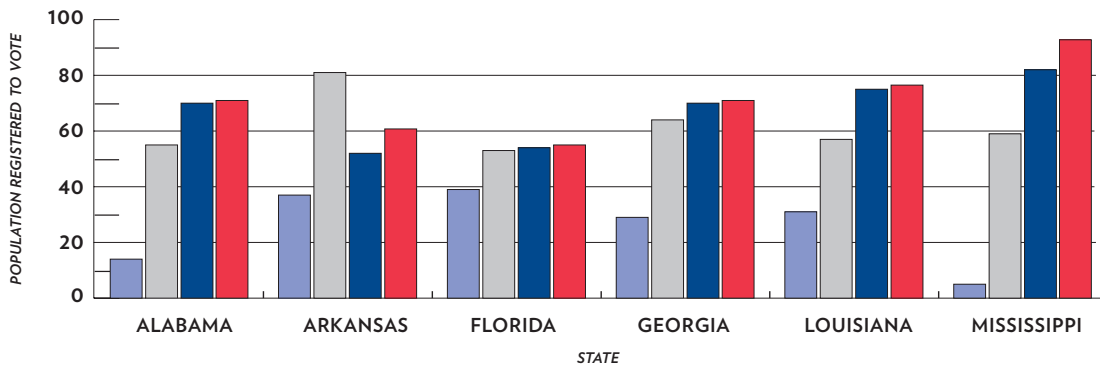


# The Voting Rights Act, 1965

## Impact in the South

*Selma: The Bridge to the Ballot* ends with passage of the Voting Rights Act and with the news that over 250,000 new black voters were registered in Alabama by the end of 1965. The impact wasn't limited to Alabama, however—it was felt throughout the South.

## Growing Ranks of Registered Voters



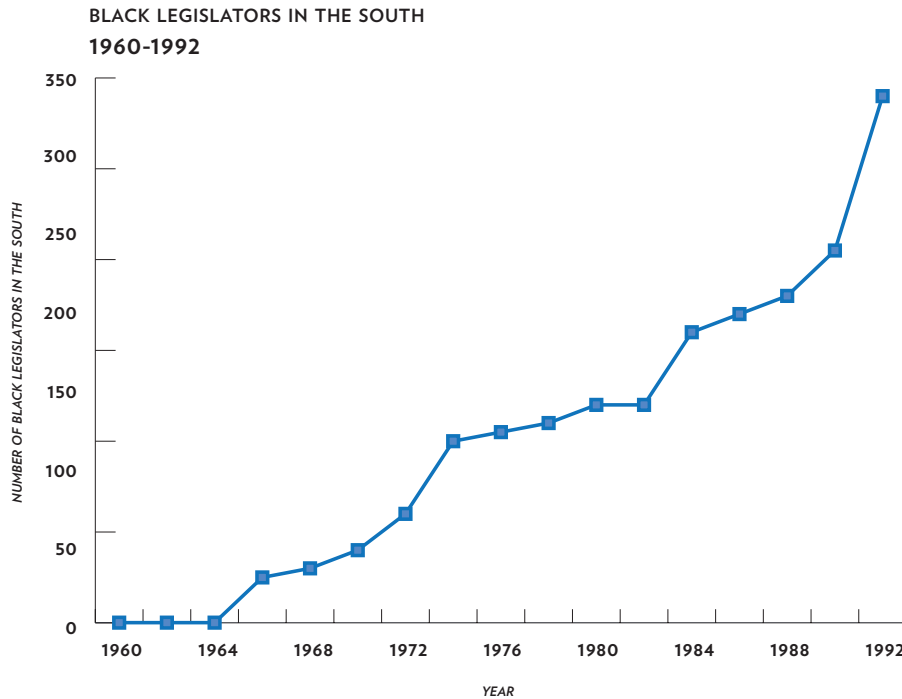
% OF REGISTERED VOTERS IN BLACK VOTING-AGE POPULATION 1960\*
  % OF REGISTERED VOTERS IN BLACK VOTING-AGE POPULATION 1971\*
  % OF REGISTERED VOTERS IN BLACK VOTING-AGE POPULATION 2008\*\*
  % OF REGISTERED VOTERS IN BLACK VOTING-AGE POPULATION 2012\*\*\*

\*Source: Frangher et al. (2003). *Out of Many: A History of the American People* (Ligon Saddle River, NJ), p. 892.  
 \*\*Source: Table 4b. Reported Voting and Registration by Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin, for States: November 2008. Link through: www.census.gov/hhes/www/socdemo/voting/publicat.html/2007/2008/tables.html  
 \*\*\*Source: Table 4b. Reported Voting and Registration by Sex, Race and Hispanic Origin, for States: November 2012. Link through: www.census.gov/hhes/www/socdemo/voting/publications/2012/2012/tables.html

### Focus Questions

- What do the states shown have in common? Why are these states included in this graph and not others?
- What trend do you see between 1960 and 1971? Between 1971 and 2008? Between 2008 and 2012?
- What do you think accounts for each change?
- Are there exceptions to the trend? What might account for these?

## Expanding Numbers of Black Legislators in the South



### Numbers Tell a Story

- What story does this graph tell?
- Based on what you've learned about U.S. history, can you explain the trend depicted on the graph?
- Write a sentence to describe the data captured in this graph. What story does this graph tell?
- When did the number of elected black legislators begin to rise? What might account for that increase?

## PART FIVE

## After Viewing

### Voting Issues Today

#### The Voting Rights Act 1965-2014

Congress tried to eliminate voting discrimination through three different civil rights acts passed between 1957 and 1964, but they all proved ineffective. Under these laws, the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) had to bring individual lawsuits to prove that a locality's practice was discriminatory. If the DOJ succeeded, local officials would simply put a new obstacle into place, forcing the DOJ to go back to court and start all over again. The process was painfully slow and disjointed.

Schemes like those in Dallas County that discriminated against black voters could be found throughout the South in 1964, despite being illegal. One of the great accomplishments of the Selma movement was to make it clear to policymakers in Washington that the existing laws didn't work. If they wanted to derail discrimination, more had to be done.

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 was different from previous laws. First, it affirmed the right to vote throughout the nation and outlawed practices that kept black people from voting. In addition to these provisions that applied everywhere, the Act included special rules for states and localities that had a history of voter discrimination.

Places covered by the special provisions were not allowed to make any changes that affected voting without "preclearance" from the U.S. attorney general or the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia. And the burden of proving that the change wouldn't have a discriminatory effect was on the jurisdiction, not the DOJ. In addition, the attorney general could dispatch federal examiners to oversee voter registration and federal observers to monitor the polls on election days.

What places were subject to these provisions? According to the law, any jurisdiction that had used a "test or device" to restrict registration or where less than 50 percent of eligible voters were registered to vote. Nine entire states—Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, Texas and Virginia—qualified for the special treatment, as did parts of California, Florida, New York, Michigan, North Carolina and South Dakota.

These provisions stood—and were strengthened by Congress—until 2013, when the *Shelby County v. Holder* case came before the U.S. Supreme Court. In the *Shelby County* case, the court ruled that it was no longer fair to require these jurisdictions to submit proposed changes to their voting procedures to the DOJ for its approval. The reason? The court said that the preclearance requirement of the Voting Rights Act had accomplished its purpose as evidenced by the fact that black citizens in the South were now registered and voted at the same rates as white citizens.

The court's ruling, however, was not a unanimous one. The justices who disagreed with the

majority's decision said that the Voting Rights Act's preclearance requirement was the reason why Southern states had made progress and that it was still necessary to prevent voting discrimination. "Throwing out preclearance when it has worked and is continuing to work to stop discriminatory changes is like throwing away your umbrella in a rainstorm because you are not getting wet," Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg wrote in her dissenting opinion.

The impact of the Supreme Court decision on the power of the Act to protect voting rights remains to be seen.

#### **Focus Questions**

Why was the federal government unable to effectively protect the right to vote before passage of the Voting Rights Act?

How does the Voting Rights Act compare to the 15th Amendment? What's similar, and what's different?

What did it mean to be subject to "preclearance"? What jurisdictions were affected?

**PART SIX**

# Do Something!

## The Vote Today

In 1965, students in Selma, Alabama, stood up for the right to vote. Youth played active roles throughout the civil rights movement. They walked through hostile mobs to integrate all-white schools in Little Rock, Arkansas, and elsewhere. College students in Greenville, South Carolina, started the lunch counter sit-ins that quickly spread across the South. Students from all over boarded buses to the Deep South to participate in the Freedom Rides and traveled to Mississippi to register black voters during Freedom Summer in 1964.

Today, we face new issues. What would you be willing to march for?

## Voting in Your Town

You've read about voting issues facing us today. Find out how these issues play out in your community. Research current voter participation in your local and state communities to find out more about turnout, participation, what's involved in registering and voting, and whether voting reforms are in the air.

## Voter Turnout

How engaged are voters in your state and community? Use online resources, like your state's website or the **U.S. Census Bureau**, to find out. One place to begin is **The United States Election Project**, where there's a link to each state's 2014 voter turnout results. Find the data for each item in your state and record them in the chart below.

State	
Overall turnout	
Women	
Men	
18-29 year olds	
Over 30	
White	
Black	
Hispanic	
Asian	

Write a short paragraph describing voter turnout in your state.

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### **Voter Restrictions or Voter Fraud**

What are the rules and regulations in your state? Is there a move to make voting more accessible or one to make it more restrictive? Are there concerns about voter integrity, either through people voting illegally, bad counting practices or inaccurate voting machines?

Visit [Vote411.org](http://Vote411.org) and click on “state and topic” to research details for your state. Visit the **Brennan Center** for Justice to find out about student voting. Record your findings in the chart below.

<b>State</b>	
<b>Absentee voting</b>	
<b>Early voting</b>	
<b>Eligibility</b>	
<b>Voting Registration</b>	
<b>ID requirements</b>	
<b>Voting machines</b>	
<b>Student voting</b>	
<b>Registration of high school seniors</b>	

In your view, does your state get voting right? If not, what would you like to see change?

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**Felon Disenfranchisement**

What are the rules in your state about felon disenfranchisement? **The Sentencing Project** and **FairVote** provide state-by-state information. Record your findings in the chart below.

State	
Disenfranchisement: Yes or No?	
When can vote be recovered?	
How many people disenfranchised?	
Is there a racial disparity?	

In your view, does disenfranchisement in your state affect voting? Explain.

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**What can we do?**

Now that you've looked into voting in your community, you have a picture of the health of democracy where you live.

How does it look?

Most likely, there's room for improvement. Fortunately, there are things you can do to help, even if you can't vote yet. Remember, the students in Selma were in their teens—and the voting age was 21 in 1965. These young people stood up for their parents' and teachers' right to vote.

Do too few eligible voters bother to go to the polls in your community? Maybe you can raise awareness of the importance of voting, or participate in get-out-the-vote efforts at election time.

Are young people uninterested? Find out how to register future voters during senior year of high school and organize a voter registration campaign at school.

Have new rules been established that make it harder for people to register or to vote? Ask questions and raise awareness about these rules.

**Strategize**

Use these questions to come up with ways to encourage voter participation in your community:

- What specific element of voter participation do you want to address?
- How can you influence participation?
- What outcomes are you seeking?
- What specific actions can you take to bring about the desired outcomes?

**Take Action**

Choose from this list of projects or create a new idea for how you will improve voter registration or voter turnout in your community.

- Publish a public service announcement on social media channels.
- Write letters to local elected officials asking for their attention to voter participation.
- Write and perform a skit designed to teach your community about the importance of voting.
- Create a flyer that supplies voting information to members of the community.
- Create a public mural reflecting the importance of voting rights.
- Create a community bulletin board with information and directions on how to register to vote.
- Organize a neighborhood voter registration day to help unregistered members of the community register to vote.
- Organize a local march to raise awareness about local political issues, election candidates and voter registration.
- Check to see if there is a local chapter of the League of Women Voters.

**Tips for Taking Action**

Think about who could be an ally.

Think about what resources are necessary to pursue the action.

Think about what channels of communication are available.



**PART SEVEN**

## Additional Resources

### Lessons on Voting

**Expanding Voting Rights, Grades 6-12**

A series of five lessons that trace the complicated historical process that led to the passage of the Voting Rights Act, 1965 and beyond.

[www.tolerance.org/lesson/expanding-voting-rights](http://www.tolerance.org/lesson/expanding-voting-rights)

**Before Rosa Parks: Frances Watkins Harper, Grades 6-12**

In this lesson, students will: analyze Frances Watkins Harper’s rhetorical strategies, such as tone, emotional appeal and descriptive language; consider the post-Civil War culture in U.S. history, particularly as it affected blacks and women; and explore the racial dynamics of the women’s suffrage movement.

[www.tolerance.org/lesson/rosa-parks-frances-watkins-harper](http://www.tolerance.org/lesson/rosa-parks-frances-watkins-harper)

**Who’s Voting Now? Grades 9-12**

Students compare and contrast the 1965 Voting Rights Act and the 1990 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

[www.tolerance.org/activity/whos-voting-now](http://www.tolerance.org/activity/whos-voting-now)

**An Historic Vote, Grades 9-12**

This lesson is designed to shed light on the historical significance of the 2008 election of President Barack Obama and to help students learn more about the struggle for a people’s right to vote.

[www.tolerance.org/lesson/historic-vote](http://www.tolerance.org/lesson/historic-vote)

### *Perspectives for a Diverse America*

The texts in *Perspectives for a Diverse America* encourage students to question common understandings, consider multiple viewpoints, analyze and critique power relationships and act to change unfair and unequal conditions. Register at

[perspectives.tolerance.org](http://perspectives.tolerance.org).

The following texts from the *Perspectives* Central Text Anthology can be used to extend student learning about multiple issues related to voting rights.

**Use these texts to teach in more depth about the 1965 voting rights movement.**

“Registering to Vote” (Theresa Burroughs and Toni Love via StoryCorps)

“Confrontation at the Bridge” (Jacob Lawrence)

“Testimony Before the Credentials Committee at the 1964 Democratic Convention”  
(Fannie Lou Hamer)

Use these texts to connect the voting rights movement of 1965 to the women’s movement.

“1920: Women Get the Vote” (Sam Roberts)

“The Awakening” (Henry Mayer)

“Declaration of Sentiments, Seneca Falls Conference, 1848” (Elizabeth Cady Stanton)

*Susan B. Anthony* (Alexandra Wallner)

Use these texts to connect the 1965 voting rights movement to current voting rights issues.

“Gay Marriage” (Steve Sack)

“Can I See Some ID?” (Patricia Smith)

## The N-Word

### Straight Talk About the N-Word

[www.tolerance.org/magazine/number-40-fall-2011/feature/straight-talk-about-n-word](http://www.tolerance.org/magazine/number-40-fall-2011/feature/straight-talk-about-n-word)

### Toolkit for “Straight Talk About the N-Word”

[www.tolerance.org/toolkit/portfolio-activity-straight-talk-about-n-word](http://www.tolerance.org/toolkit/portfolio-activity-straight-talk-about-n-word)

### The N-Word: Connected Through Historical Disconnect?

[www.tolerance.org/blog/n-word-connected-through-historical-disconnect](http://www.tolerance.org/blog/n-word-connected-through-historical-disconnect)

### Exploring the Power of the N-Word

[www.tolerance.org/blog/exploring-power-n-word](http://www.tolerance.org/blog/exploring-power-n-word)

## Films on the Civil Rights Movement

### *America’s Civil Rights Movement: A Time for Justice*

In *A Time for Justice*, four-time Academy Award-winning filmmaker Charles Guggenheim captures the spirit of the civil rights movement through historical footage and the voices of those who participated in the struggle.

[www.tolerance.org/kit/america-s-civil-rights-movement-time-justice](http://www.tolerance.org/kit/america-s-civil-rights-movement-time-justice)

### *Mighty Times: The Children’s March*

This special teacher’s edition of the Academy Award-winning documentary film, along with accompanying resources, tells the heroic story of the young people in Birmingham, Alabama, who brought segregation to its knees.

[www.tolerance.org/kit/mighty-times-childrens-march](http://www.tolerance.org/kit/mighty-times-childrens-march)

## Additional Resources We Recommend

### ***Idea Book for Educators: The Civil Rights Act of 1964***

The idea book presents dozens of unique primary sources from the Library of Congress' collections that illuminate the unjust laws and practices that preceded the Civil Rights Act of 1964, coupled with teaching ideas that allow educators to prompt critical analysis and informed debate from their students.

[loc.gov/teachers/newsevents/idea-book/](http://loc.gov/teachers/newsevents/idea-book/)

### ***The Civil Rights Act of 1964: A Long Struggle for Freedom***

This Library of Congress exhibition commemorating the Civil Rights Act of 1964 includes online resources for students and educators, exhibitions related to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and recommended readings for further understanding.

[loc.gov/exhibits/civil-rights-act/index.html](http://loc.gov/exhibits/civil-rights-act/index.html)

### **FairVote**

FairVote is a non-profit, non-partisan organization focused on voting reform via research, analytics and education. The website offers reports on presidential and congressional elections, redistricting, voting rights, voter turnout and representation of women, and also offers lesson plans for educators.

[fairvote.org](http://fairvote.org)

### **League of Women Voters**

The League of Women Voters, formed from the movement that secured the right to vote for women, works to expand participation and give voice to all Americans. Its website provides state- and federal-level voting information.

[lww.org](http://lww.org)

### **Lowndes County Interpretive Center**

Funded by the National Park Service, Lowndes County Interpretive Center is dedicated to those who peacefully marched 54 miles from Selma to the capitol building in Montgomery in order to gain the right to vote. The Interpretive Center offers both classroom resources and educational resources for teachers.

[nps.gov/semo/planyourvisit/index.htm](http://nps.gov/semo/planyourvisit/index.htm)

### **The Sentencing Project**

The Sentencing Project is a non-profit organization focused on legal advocacy and reforms to sentencing practices, specifically those that target racial disparities in incarceration rates and provide alternatives to incarceration. The Project also addresses issues of felony disenfranchisement, and offers an interactive map of felony disenfranchisement law by state.

[sentencingproject.org](http://sentencingproject.org)

### **VOTE411.org**

VOTE411.org is a non-partisan “one-stop shop” for information related to elections and voting, including a polling-place locator.

[vote411.org](http://vote411.org)

### **Voting Rights & Elections at the Brennan Center for Justice**

The Brennan Center for Justice works to preserve and expand the right to vote for every eligible citizen. Through practical policy proposals, litigation, advocacy and communications, the Brennan Center works to ensure that voting is free, fair and accessible for all Americans. The Brennan Center website also provides up-to-date information about contemporary voting issues.

[\*brennancenter.org/issues/voting-rights-elections\*](http://brennancenter.org/issues/voting-rights-elections)

**PART EIGHT****Answer Keys****PART THREE****Before Viewing****African Americans Get the Vote—or Do They?****What does each amendment say?**

xiii: Abolishes slavery, and says there can be no "involuntary servitude" except as punishment for a crime.

xiv: says that anyone who was born in the united states is a citizen of both the nation and the state they live in. Forbids states from limiting the rights of citizens or taking away life, liberty or property without proper legal procedures and guarantees that the laws will apply equally to all people.

xv: The right to vote can't be denied to people because of their race or because they were once enslaved.

**How does each amendment change the Constitution?**

xiii: once slavery is outlawed, two clauses of the constitution were no longer in effect. They were the three-fifth clause, and the fugitive slave clause.

xiv: previously, states could define citizenship, and this amendment also put new limits on what states could do by extending the "due process" clause to the states.

xv: This is the first amendment about voting, and adds voting to the constitution.

**Why was each amendment enacted? Why is each important? What rights does each guarantee to African Americans?**

xiii: It was enacted in response to the union victory in the civil war. It was important because it ended the formal institution of slavery, and it granted the basic right of freedom to African Americans.

xiv: This amendment was part of the reconstruction plan put forth by Republicans in Congress, and southern states that wanted to be re-admitted to the union and regain representation in Congress were required to ratify it. It's important because it establishes the idea of birthright citizenship, establishes that African Americans are citizens, and that they have equal rights under the law.

xv: The amendment filled a gap in the others by guaranteeing the right to vote for African-Americans.

**What provisions does each amendment make for enforcement of its guarantees?**

**Who has the power to enforce the amendment? How?**

XIII: Congress was given the power to pass legislation to enforce the amendment.

XIV: No specific provisions were included to enforce the definition of citizenship or the limits on state power. Under the supremacy clause, questions about these would be left to the supreme court.

XV: Congress was given the power to pass legislation to enforce the amendment.

**PART EIGHT**

# Answer Keys

**PART THREE****Before Viewing****Broken Promises**

The 15th Amendment says that voting could not be restricted because of race. How did Southern states prevent African Americans from exercising their right to vote?

The states got around the amendment by putting in regulations that affected African Americans more than white citizens. poll taxes, literacy tests and grandfather clauses kept people who were poor and less educated mainly black people from the polls.

When did the number of black legislators reach its peak? Based on what you've learned about U.S. history, can you explain the trend depicted in the graph?

In 1872, during Reconstruction and after passage of the 15th amendment, when freedmen were able to vote.

When did the number of black legislators begin to fall? What might account for that decrease?

The number fell sharply after 1877, when federal troops were withdrawn from the south and Reconstruction ended. After Jim Crow laws and legal segregation went into effect, the number fell to zero.

Make a prediction for the data for the next ten years after the last date on the chart. Explain your prediction.

Answers will vary, but most students should see that the trend will remain flat as long as the laws don't change.

**PART EIGHT**

# Answer Keys

**PART FOUR**

## During Viewing

### What's Happening?

Student answers will vary; these are suggested answers.

**Act I (00:00–11:51)****1. What event inspired the voting rights campaign in Alabama?**

The bombing of the 16th street Baptist Church in Birmingham led civil rights leaders like Diane Nash and James Bevel to call for a voting rights campaign.

**2. Why were students better able than adults to organize and protest?**

They were not at risk of losing jobs or being evicted from farms.

**3. What obstacles kept most black citizens from being able to vote?**

The poll tax, literacy tests, need for an already-registered person to "vouch" for a new voter were all legal impediments. The registrar's office was open only twice a month. would-be registrants had their names printed in the newspaper and were subject to economic reprisals: loss of credit at a store, being fired from a job, or being evicted from land and literacy tests were legal obstacles.

**4. How did student activists oppose segregation and injustice in Selma? What risks did they take?**

They conducted nonviolent action, sitting in at segregated lunch counters and demonstrating outside the county courthouse. They risked being beaten and arrested.

**5. How did the segregationist sheriff and judge respond to the demonstrations?**

with force. The sheriff and his possemen used cattle prods and billy clubs and arrested demonstrators. Judge Hare issued an injunction making it illegal for three or more civil rights advocates to meet.

**Act II (11:52–29:11)****1. Why did Dr. King come to Selma?**

He had been invited by the Dallas County Voters League and recognized that demonstrations and arrests in Selma might capture the attention of the nation.

**2. Why did demonstrators march to the courthouse every day?**

some hoped to be admitted to register others were calling attention to the denial of the vote.



**3. What was the significance of the teachers joining the protests? What risks did they take?**

As professionals, they were leaders in the black community, and their participation led others to march. They took the risk of being arrested or fired.

**4. How did the death of Jimmie Lee Jackson affect the campaign?**

His death prompted activists to plan the march from Selma to Montgomery and bring their demands to the governor.

**5. What happened in Selma after Bloody Sunday made national news?**

Dr. King put out a national call for clergy to come to Selma. Hundreds of nuns, priests and ministers along with other supporters streams into Selma to join the marchers.

**Act III (29:12–39:10)****1. Why did the marchers turn around the second time they gathered at Edmund Pettus Bridge?**

There was a federal court order against the march, and Dr. King did not want to violate that.

**2. Why were ministers from all over the country in Selma? What risks did they take?**

They came in response to Dr. King's call and to support the cause. They risked violence and even death.

**3. What was the significance of the barricade around George Washington Carver Homes?**

It was intended to keep people from protesting downtown, but teenagers were able to slip out anyway.

**4. Why was President Johnson's use of the phrase "we shall overcome" meaningful to marchers?**

It was a phrase used by African Americans in the civil rights movement. The marchers felt Johnson was saying he was one of them, on their side.

**5. What was the immediate effect of the passage of the Voting Rights Act?**

Thousands of people were able to register to vote for the first time in their lives.

## Strategy 2: Can We Ever Have a Complete Picture?

STRATEGY 2		
LEADERS	Lyndon B. Johnson Martin Luther King, Jr. James Bevel Diane Nash Hosea Williams James Orange	Bernard Lafayette John Lewis Rev. F.D. Reese Amelia Boynton Margaret Moore Rev. C.T. Vivian
GROUPS	(National) Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, Southern Christian Leadership Conference (Local) Dallas County Voters	League, Marion Civic League, Selma Teachers' Association, congregations and leadership of Brown, Tabernacle and First Baptist churches, Hudson High football team
EVENTS	Teachers' March Murder of Jimmie Lee Jackson Murder of James Ray LBJ speech announcing Voting Rights Act Bloody Sunday	Turnaround Tuesday Selma to Montgomery March Demonstration at Capitol Passage of the Voting Rights Act, August 1965
HISTORICAL CONTEXT	15th Amendment Jim Crow laws poll tax, literacy tests, grandfather clause White Supremacy in the Black Belt of Alabama Birmingham Campaign	16th Street Baptist Church bombing Brown 1954, Montgomery Bus Boycott 1955-56, Freedom Rides 1961, Mississippi Freedom Summer, Civil Rights Act, 1964
OPPOSITION	Violence, intimidation George Wallace's "segregation now, segregation forever" stance Sheriff Jim Clark and his "posse"	Judge Hare's injunctions forbidding meetings of three or more people White Citizens Council, Ku Klux Klan
TACTICS	voter registration, youth organizing, sit-ins, mass demonstrations, peaceful marches—daily, to Montgomery, prayer meetings, mass arrests	Goals: register voters, gain national attention, urge federal gov't to enforce the 15th Amendment by passing legislation.

### Strategy 3: Power to the People

STRATEGY 3	STUDENTS	TEACHERS	LOCAL (SELMA)	STATE/NATIONAL
SUPPORTER OF THE MOVEMENT	Charles Bonner Charles Mauldin Lynda Blackmon Joanne Blackmon Avery Williams Hazel Chatmon Willie Robinson Bettie Fikes Henry Allen Terry Shaw	Frederick Reese Margaret Moore Sarah Craig Lawrence Huggins	Amelia Boynton Jimmie Lee Jackson	James Reeb John Lewis Hosea Williams C.T. Vivian Martin Luther King, Jr. Diane Nash James Bevel Bernard Lafayette Lyndon B. Johnson Frank Johnson Clark Olsen
OPPONENT OF THE MOVEMENT			Sheriff Jim Clark Judge James Hare Mayor Joseph T. Smitherman Chief Wilson Baker	George Wallace

## Strategy 4: Let's Get Organized!

	GROUPS AT WORK IN THE VOTING RIGHTS MOVEMENT		
	DCVL	SCLC	SNCC
WHO	people in and around Dallas County mostly teachers	Governed by an elected board and made up of an organization of affiliates mostly churches and religious organizations	Grassroots organization made up of college students and unpaid volunteers
GOALS	provide community services, citizenship education and register black selma residents to vote	Draw national attention to put pressure on lawmakers to change federal law	organize local young adults and college students to help register residents to vote
TACTICS	voter registration, education	Nonviolent protest, speeches, mass arrests, demonstrations, media attention	Nonviolent protest, sit-ins, demonstrations, arrests
DANGERS	Loss of employment, harassment, intimidation, Arrest, physical harm		

**PART EIGHT**

# Answer Keys

**PART FIVE****After Viewing****The Voting Rights Act****Obstacles Cleared**

**What barriers faced by residents of Dallas County did the Voting Rights Act of 1965 ban?**

The law banned the literacy tests and poll taxes registrants had to pay. Federal examiners oversaw the registration process to ensure it was fair.

**What provisions in the legislation ensured that the Act would remain effective over time?**

In Alabama and other places with a history of discrimination, any proposed changes to the way voting happened would require court approval. In addition, federal observers would be present at polling places to ensure voting took place fairly.

**The Voting Rights Act of 1965****Impact in the South—Growing Ranks of Registered Voters**

**What do the states shown have in common? Why are these states included in this graph and not others?**

These are all southern states with a history of voter discrimination — and all places where slavery was legal until the Civil War.

**What trend do you see between 1960 and 1971? Between 1971 and 2008? Between 2008 and 2012? What do you think accounts for each change?**

In most states, there was a large increase in registered black voters between 1960 and 1971 and again from 1971 to 2008. The increase from 2008 to 2012 was smaller.

**Are there exceptions to the trend? What might account for these?**

Florida and Tennessee didn't increase as much as other states. They are not part of the Deep South.

**Expanding Numbers of Black Legislators in the South**

**What story does this graph tell?**

The numbers show that, beginning with the 1966 election, African Americans began to be elected to southern legislatures. Over the next 30 years, the numbers grew steadily.

**Based on what you've learned about U.S. history, can you explain the trend depicted on the graph?**

It was only after the civil rights movement's successes, especially passage of the voting rights Act, that black legislators began to serve in the south. The number increased over time as more people saw public office as a possibility.

**Write a sentence to describe the data captured in this graph. What story does the graph tell?**

The data shows a steady increase in the overall number of black legislators serving in the south from 1964 to 1992. The numbers suggest greater black participation in voting and politics.

**When did the number of elected black legislators begin to rise? What might account for that increase?**

In 1966, after passage of the voting rights Act.

## Today's Voting Issues

### The Voting Rights Act, 1965–2014

**Why was the federal government unable to effectively protect the right to vote before passage of the Voting Rights Act?**

The Department of Justice had to bring individual court cases to prove that state or county was discriminating. The burden of proof was on the federal government, the cases took a long time, and if the state changed tactics, the DOJ had to start all over again.

**How does the Voting Rights Act compare to the 15th Amendment? What's similar, and what's different?**

Like the 15th amendment, it guarantees the right to vote regardless of race. What's different is that it makes tactics that result in discrimination illegal. More important, it gave the federal government strong enforcement powers.

**What did it mean to be subject to "preclearance"? What jurisdictions were affected?**

It meant that no changes could be made in how registration and voting took place without prior approval from the federal government. The burden of proving that the change wouldn't be discriminatory was on the state. Places that had a history of past discrimination because of tests, or where fewer than 50 percent of eligible voters were registered, were affected.

**PART EIGHT**

# Answer Keys

**PART SIX**

## **Do Something!**

### **The Vote Today**

*Answers will vary according to state. students should use online resources to research voter turnout, voting regulations, and felony disenfranchisement policies for their own state.*



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