

Name _____



Selma to Montgomery

By Jane Runyon

The 1963 March on Washington, D.C. was dramatic and massive. An estimated 300,000 people were present. The Civil Rights movement had momentum. Unfortunately, events did not allow for a quick solution to problems among the races. On Sunday, September 15, less than a month after the Washington rally, a bomb was thrown into a church in Birmingham, Alabama. Twenty-one children were injured, and four young girls were killed by the explosion. In November of 1963, the President of the United States, John F. Kennedy, was assassinated in Dallas, Texas. Fear was present in all races.



It was not an easy job, but on July 2, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964. This bill banned racial discrimination in all public facilities as well as voting places. As it turned out, this would not be the complete solution.

Alabama became a focal point for people trying to put the new rules of social change into place. The governor of Alabama was George Wallace. He was against any type of federal **intervention** into what he considered local business. Alabama had always been segregated into whites and blacks. That is how he intended for it to remain.

In 1963, a group in Alabama's "Black Belt" decided to organize. They called themselves the Dallas County Improvement Association. They wanted to rid their county of all "White" and "Colored" signs. Selma, a town in Dallas County, was chosen as the site for demonstrations. Members of the Improvement Association were joined by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and members of the SCLC. The mayor of Selma wanted no bad publicity for his city. He made sure there were no confrontations between demonstrators and the law.

This result was not the same in the town of Marion, Alabama. This town was just twenty-five miles from Selma. Only one of every one hundred African Americans eligible to vote in Dallas County was registered. African Americans in Marion decided to stage their own demonstration to try to get more of their own registered. A march to the courthouse turned into a riot when local police charged the marchers and beat them. A young black man who had led his mother into a nearby café for safety was shot and killed. This killing motivated the demonstrators even more.

A march from Selma to the capitol in Montgomery was planned. It took three

tries, but the marchers finally reached their goal. The first attempt occurred on March 7, 1965. Six hundred civil rights marchers started walking out of Selma on the highway. They got only six blocks away from their starting point when they were met by state and local lawmen. The marchers were beaten with billy clubs and sprayed with tear gas. Newspapers carried the story of the attack. They called it "Bloody Sunday."

Two days later, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. led a tribute walk to the bridge where the marchers had been attacked. The civil rights leaders petitioned the federal court. They argued that they had a right to march. The judge agreed. He told them they had the right to march on a public highway if they wanted.

On Sunday, March 21, approximately 3,200 marchers left Selma, Alabama, on their way to Montgomery. By the time they reached the state capital on Thursday, their number had grown to over 25,000. Five months later, President Lyndon Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Another step toward racial equality had been made.

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Questions

- _____ 1. President John Kennedy oversaw the signing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.
 - A. true
 - B. false
- _____ 2. Where was a church bombed?
 - A. Marion
 - B. Montgomery
 - C. Selma
 - D. Birmingham
- _____ 3. What does the word "massive" mean as used in the first sentence?

- _____ 4. Why were the people in Marion, Alabama, demonstrating?
 - A. They wanted segregated schools.
 - B. They wanted equal housing.
 - C. They wanted to register more African Americans to vote.
 - D. They wanted equal pay.

