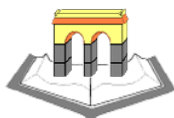


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**The Southern Christian Leadership Conference
and its Impact on the Selma Campaign
(1963-1965)**

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Dedications

To those who begot me to this life and overwhelmed me with their endless sacrifices,

my dear parents...

To my brother and sister, **Khaled and Fatima...**

To the newborn baby, the candle that enlightened our lives, **Ahlem...**

To my spiritual father, **Mr. Abdel-Karim CHAMI ...**

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Abstract

The Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) is an African American organization that was founded in 1957 under the leadership of Martin Luther King, Jr. to alter the discriminatory laws that restricted the freedom of blacks in America and kept them as second class citizens. In this regard, this research paper highlights the contribution of this organization to the passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965. A qualitative method was implemented by gleaning and analyzing the necessary data from the available historical sources, including books, articles, recorded interviews and narrations of eyewitnesses. The results show that though SCLC was not the prime mover of the campaign that started in 1963 to put an end to the phenomenon of blacks' disenfranchisement, its involvement in 1964 had a significant impact on signing the Voting Rights Act in 1965 since its presence in the campaign paved the way for the adoption of the nonviolent strategies and the interference of media that could capture images of the violent treatment of peaceful blacks during their march. As a result, the federal government was compelled to take a prompt action.

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List of Acronyms

ABC	American Broadcasting Company
CBS	Columbia Broadcasting System
CORE	Congress of Racial Equality
DCVL	Dallas County Voters League
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
KKK	Ku Klux Klan
KWC	The Knights of the White Camelia
MIA	Montgomery Improvement Association
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People
NBC	National Broadcasting Company
NUL	National Urban League
SCLC	Southern Christian Leadership Conference
SNCC	Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee
UNIA	The Universal Negro Improvement Association
WCC	White Citizens' Council
WPC	The Women's Political Council

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General Introduction

The Southern Christian Leadership Conference did not come out of nowhere. It is the inevitable outcome that the blacks' staunch determination to be fully integrated in the American society begot. Indeed, for about three centuries, blacks sustained being reluctantly taken from their homeland in Africa to undergo a new life in America, laden with too much drudgery and no shred of opportunity to get their freedom whatsoever. Browbeaten to adapt with a rigid regime, blacks were divested of nearly all their basic civil rights and coerced to succumb to their landowners' control. It was not until the end of the American Civil War (1861-1865) that a wave of change swept the American land when slavery became permanently illicit and equal rights of citizenship were guaranteed after the adoption of the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth constitutional Amendments in 1865, 1868, and 1870 respectively.

Corollary to the new situation was the alteration in the status of both blacks and white Southerners. While the former rejoiced over experiencing the essence of freedom for the first time by owning lands, being educated, and having their voices heard through voting, the latter recoiled for they perceived the shift as a bugbear since it struck at the very basis of their economy. Inevitably, they eschewed to relinquish the control that they wielded over their former slaves and soon after 1877 they managed to retrieve their power and create an even more restrictive web of stringent regulations that kept blacks ostracized.

A thinly disguised slavery took place and was manifested in the espousal of discrimination. Be it forced by law or violence, racial segregation prevailed in blacks' lives, so that wherever they went they came across the "Whites Only" signs that made sharing public accommodations with whites far from being carried out. Even playing with white children was forbidden and any bid to defy the rules would cost its doer

dear. This new system was directed towards weaning blacks off power, so they would never think about equality. But grasping the meaning of freedom after being long deprived of it would rather push for the claim of equality and therein lies the cause of blacks' protests and the emergence of the Civil Rights Movement.

Displaying their response to the system that kept them marginalized, blacks either fled the South to the North, or fought in many ways such as writing, singing, delivering speeches, and founding organizations to claim for their rights as full American citizens. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) emerged in 1909, among other groups. With the aim of eradicating race prejudice and ensuring economic, political, educational and social parity, NAACP hung its work on the manipulation of segregation cases in courts. Slowly but surely, it won the legalization of desegregation in schools in 1954, yet turning words into tangible actions proved to be a more grueling task. Segregationists hung tough on their attitudes, so blacks' attempts to be integrated in the whites' schools were violently turned down. Thus, the need to transcend the court action became requisite.

In 1955 the death of a fourteen-year-old black boy Emmet Till added fuel to the flames when his body was mercilessly mutilated, but his killers were never sentenced to the punishment they deserved. In the thick of this event a black woman surfaced. Her decision to get out of her stoicism catalyzed the emergence of the nonviolent direct action. Spending a tiring workday, Rosa Parks dared to defy the racial laws in Montgomery, Alabama by refusing to surrender her seat to a white man when she rode the bus on December 1, 1955. As she was incarcerated, blacks led a bus boycott that lasted for one year and climaxed with the desegregation of the Montgomery bus system.

In emulation of the foregoing action, blacks in other cities such as Birmingham in Alabama and Tallahassee in Florida triggered the creation of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) in 1957 that helped in coordinating and organizing their efforts. Formed to be unlike the former groups mainly NAACP, SCLC derived its

principles from the Christian doctrine and went beyond the court action by basing its activism on the adoption of the nonviolent direct action as a strategy that would secure the intervention of the federal government to enforce the laws. Because of the fame it achieved, blacks in Selma, Alabama asked for its interference in 1964 since their campaign against disenfranchisement was on the verge of defeat. From this point stemmed the stimulus that prompted the present dissertation to be penned.

In fact, SCLC joined the movement howbeit it was not its prime mover. Selma's blacks had long tried to reach the ballot box but in vein. In 1963 the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), a youth organization that was forged by virtue of SCLC's aid in 1961, enhanced local leaders to set about a drive in 1963 to gain the right to vote, but contrary to their expectations, their efforts went awry in front of the incessant segregationists' massive resistance, and the call for SCLC's assistance in 1964 seemed to be the sought after solution. A year later the Voting Rights Act was passed.

Subsequently, this research sets up an enquiry into the impact of the SCLC's intervention on the Selma Campaign. In other words, it aims at exploring the extent to which the SCLC's presence influenced the Selma Campaign and contributed to the passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965, by investigating its adopted strategies vis-à-vis those implemented before it could get down to the campaign. Thereby, the accomplishment of the actual paper pivots on offering an answer to the following question: To what extent did the SCLC's participation in the Selma Campaign change the course of the movement?

The process of addressing the above raised question springs up the essential need to devise a blueprint that serves in advancing the cause of this dissertation. It necessitates going into the whys and the wherefores of both the foundation of the organization and the initiation of the campaign in Selma, for they constitute the key particulars of the actual study that is severed up into three chapters accordingly.

The first chapter is earmarked for tackling the emergence of SCLC. Since the birth of this latter is the outcome of the blacks' ongoing resistance to the racial system that set them apart from the whites, it is necessary not to pass over this period. Thus, with the intention of defining the reasons of SCLC's formation, part of this chapter is concerned with sketching out the basic experiences that blacks went through after the end of the American Civil War in 1865 till 1957. Then, the second part gives insights into the structure, philosophy, strategies, and aims of the organization under study. Furthermore, the activism of SCLC up to 1963 is featured in order to be able to highlight the reasons that pushed blacks in Selma to call for its help.

The second chapter tackles the Selma Campaign before the presence of SCLC. It depicts the situation of blacks in Selma in order to accentuate the impetus behind launching a voting drive there. Moreover, it attempts to diagnose the causes that encumbered black Civil Rights activists from attaining the results they longed for, so as to understand the reasons behind the appearance of SCLC on the scene of the battle, paving the way for the third chapter.

The third chapter is the nub of the matter since it is devoted to examine the impact of SCLC on the Selma Campaign by stressing the role it played when it joined the movement. To put it differently, this chapter will be singled out for the focus on the way SCLC mapped out the campaign by casting light on the strategies it adopted and their impact on the course of the movement.



Chapter One

**The Foundation of the Southern Christian
Leadership Conference (1865-1963)**

Chapter One: The Foundation of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (1865-1963)

1. Introduction

The end of the American Civil War (1861-1865) betokened a new dawn of history for the blacks who held the burden of living in the grip of slavery for nearly three centuries in America. Ultimately, the year 1865 brought the ratification of the thirteenth Amendment that abolished slavery, so the manacles of bondage were smashed and blacks were freed. For the first time, they could experience the access to some fields, such as politics and education. However, it was a short-lived experience since it lasted only for ten years, giving way to a new system. The American Southerners, who stoutly dissented to acquiesce in equality with their former slaves, were empowered by the Compromise of 1877. Consequently, they substituted enslavement with discrimination, segregation, and lynching to encumber blacks' full integration in the American society. Hence, in a bid to breach the wall of the new implemented racial system, and to stamp out the usurpation of their rights by the racist whites, blacks either migrated to the North or defied segregationists by dint of different means mainly founding organizations, such as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) which was formed in 1957. Its origins, structure, aims, philosophy, strategies and activism up to 1963 constitute the axis around which this chapter revolves.

2. The Origins of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference

The emergence of SCLC owes its origins to the changeover of blacks' status from being free with certain rights to enjoy in the Reconstruction era¹ (1865-1877), to the status of being marginalized people thwarted from being full American citizens after 1877. Rejecting being treated as social pariahs, blacks either migrated or vied for equality. Their fight to end the infringement of their civil rights got underway,

¹ It represents the period that followed the American Civil War (1861-1865) which was waged between the Northern American states and the Southern seceded states who are also called the Confederates. This period is characterized by a process of restoring the Southern states to the Union, and helping the freed slaves by dint of the passage of acts and legislations. Sol Holt, *The Dictionary of American History* (New York: McFadden Bartell, 1970), 303.

Chapter One: The Foundation of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (1865-1963)

sparkling the foundation of diverse organizations including SCLC to serve as a voice on all segregated blacks' behalf in America

2.1. Blacks' Status in America during the Reconstruction Era (1865-1877)

Being “a crusade that destroyed slavery”¹, the American Civil War, by its end, freed over 4.5 million enslaved blacks². Yet, seizing freedom for them was not enough unless they could be utterly integrated into the American society. Indeed, the end of the war fueled their aspiration to forge a new life, similar to that of the whites'. They wanted to dispose themselves completely of all the last vestiges of the slavery regime. Similarly, proponents of the anti-slavery movement and members of the Republican Party³, such as Charles Sumner of Massachusetts and Thaddeus Stevens of Pennsylvania, who battled for the freedmen's rights, considered blacks' emancipation as a travesty of freedom if blacks could not attain their civil and political rights.⁴ Therefore, the follow-up stage of reuniting the North with the South was not devoid of addressing the status of the newly freed population.

The first step towards maximizing blacks' independence is embodied in the meeting that was held in Savannah, Georgia, on January 11, 1865, between twenty black leaders led by Garrison Frazier who was a former slave, the U.S.A secretary of war Edwin M. Stanton, and the Union's general Stan William T. Sherman⁵. The meeting was set to discuss the future of the freedmen from the vantage point of all the attendees, chiefly the blacks. When he was asked, Garrison Frazier replied by

¹ In his second inaugural address, in March 1865, the American president Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865) described the Civil War as “a crusade to destroy slavery” since it brought an end to the slavery phenomenon. (Cited in David Paterson, Susan Willoughby, and Doug Willoughby, *Civil Rights in the USA, 1863-1980* (London: Heinemann, 2001), 27.

² Jeffrey R. Kerr-Ritchie, “Anti-colonial Movements,” in *Encyclopedia of African-American culture and history: the Black experience in the Americas*, 2nd ed. ed. Colin A. Palmer (USA: Macmillan Reference, 2006), 106.

³ The Republican Party is one of the major parties in the United States of America which is known by its stance against the extension of slavery. <http://www.britannica.com/topic/Republican-Party> (accessed April 14, 2016)

⁴ Cited in Jeff Wallenfeldt, ed., *The American Civil War and Reconstruction: 1850 to 1890* (New York: Britannica Educational Publishing, 2011), 50.

⁵ Russell Duncan, *Freedom's Shore: Tunis Campbell and the Georgia Freedmen* (Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1986), 19.

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envisioning a nation in which all its citizens would possess lands. He indicated, “the way we can best take care of ourselves is to have land...we prefer to live by ourselves”¹. Subsequently, the meeting culminated with the passage of the Special Field Order No. 15 by General William T. Sherman, wherein each freed family was vouchsafed forty acres of the coastline lands that stretched from South Carolina to Florida, combined with the possibility of borrowing mules from the army². Thus, after living as slaves who toiled unwillingly in the plantation fields to serve their landowners, blacks not only partook in the meeting with expressing their views, but they also gained the opportunity of having lands of their own and managing their affairs as free autonomous citizens.

Moreover, on March 13, 1865, Congress established an agency named as the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands with the view of lending support to the newly freed population by raising their status economically and socially. By July 1870, the Bureau’s achievements in support of blacks were estimated as follows: the allocation of 21 million free rations, the transportation of 30,000 blacks from refuges to farms, the administration of 60 hospitals and asylums in which more than half a million patients were treated, and the disbursement of 6 million dollars to 5,000 black Union veterans.³

Confirming the equality of all citizens, Congress passed the Civil Right Act of 1866, granting citizenship to every black man⁴. However, on the other side of the fence, were the white Southerners who, in the interest of their economic prosperity, relied on the black slaves to accomplish the plantation work during the period that preceded the end of the American Civil War. Given that the American South economy was based on the system of slavery, Southerners were hell-bent on repudiating any

¹Duncan, 19.

² Stephanie Fitzgerald, *Reconstruction: Rebuilding America after the Civil War*, ed. Alexa L Sandmann (Minnesota :Capstone, 2010), 11.

³ Dorothy Schneider and Carl J. Schneider, *Slavery in America* (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2007), 358.

⁴ Holt, 79.

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acquiescence in the new political and social situation. In the fall of 1865, the governor of Mississippi expressed this feeling in the following words:

Under the pressure of federal bayonets the people of Mississippi have abolished the institution of slavery. The Negro is free whether we like or not. To be free, however, does not make him a citizen or entitle him to social or political equality with the white man.¹

The aforesaid statement exemplified the stance of nearly all the Southern states on giving equal right to their former slaves. One of the members of the South Carolina family confirmed this view when she mentioned that local whites after the end of the American Civil War “requested the Negroes be called up, and told them they were not free, but slaves, and would be until they died.”²

Accordingly, President Andrew Johnson (1808-1875), whose presidency started in 1865 and ended in 1869, and was described by one Southern senator as “the benefactor of the Southern people”³, adopted a plan called “the Presidential Reconstruction” which served the interest of the white Southerners from 1865 till 1867. It declared that “white men alone must manage the South”⁴. President Andrew Johnson pardoned the Confederates who would swear an oath of allegiance to the Union, and ordered the restoration of all lands taken by the freed people under the Special Field Order No. 15. Furthermore, in 1866, he vetoed the renewal of the Freedmen’s bureau for he reckoned that only states were responsible for protecting and dealing with the freedmen without the intervention of the Bureau.⁵

¹ Cited in William A. Dobak , *Freedom by the Sword: The U.S. Colored Troops, 1862-1867* (Washington D.C: Government Printing Office, 2011), 483.

² Cited in Peter Kolchin, *American Slavery 1619-1877* (England: penguin books, 1995), 209.

³ Cited in Paterson, 31.

⁴ Schneider and Carl J. Schneider, 349.

⁵ Fred L. Israel and Jim F. Watts, *Presidential Documents: The Speeches, Proclamations, and Policies that Have Shaped the Nation from Washington to Clinton* (Hove: Psychology Press, 2000), 142.

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The situation had been exacerbated by the Southerners who passed a number of laws, the “Black Codes”¹, in order to debar blacks from living independently and to limit their civil rights. Author Norman Coombs noted that “the South was trying to recreate the peculiar institution [slavery] in law while not admitting it in name.”² To put it differently, Southerners hankered after getting back the control they had long exercised over their previous slaves. Thus, in spite of the fact that the Black Codes differed from one state to another, they served the same purpose. In Mississippi, blacks were barred from giving evidence against whites and serving on juries; South Carolina’s Codes obliged blacks to pay taxes that ranged from \$10 to \$100 if they opted for practicing non-agricultural jobs; Florida’s blacks were treated harshly either by whipping or pillory with the view of forcing their labor³. Some Black Codes even went farther by encumbering blacks from hunting and fishing to prevent them from feeding themselves.⁴

Besides, law was not the sole method to fetter blacks’ freedom; instead, Southerners espoused another even more restrictive way. They resorted to a stern violence to detain blacks’ lives in a terrifying atmosphere. Secret clubs such as the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) and The Knights of the White Camelia (KWC) were founded in 1866 and 1867 respectively. By virtue of brutal⁵ techniques, these groups sought to maintain the whites’ control and hamper blacks’ process of attaining their rights.

As a result, the freed blacks were on the verge of falling again prey to the Southerners’ control. Thereupon, members of the Republican Party took a leap forward to secure blacks’ rights. They rejected the Black Codes and abjured President

¹ Black Codes refer to the rules that the Southerners set during the Reconstruction Era to fetter blacks from enjoying their rights as free people. The codes in fact existed long before the emancipation of slaves but were called Slave Codes since blacks at that time were still bound by the slavery regime. Slave Codes were designed to wield a complete control over slaves. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/slave-code> (accessed April 14, 2016)

² Norman Coombs, *The Black Experience in America: the Immigrant Heritage of America* (North Charleston: BookSurge LLC, 2004), 139.

³ Paul Finkelman, “Black Codes”, in *Encyclopedia of Race and Racism*, ed. John Hartwell Moore (USA: Macmillan Reference, 2008), 188.

⁴ Schneider and Carl J. Schneider, 350.

⁵ Hugh Brogan, *The penguin history of the USA*, 2nd ed. (London: Penguin Books, 1999), 367.

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Johnson's plan by considering it lenient¹. Congress, therefore, pushed through new legislations including the Fourteenth Amendment in 1868 that granted blacks citizenship and equal protection before the law²; the Fifteenth Amendment in 1870 which provided them with the opportunity to vote³; the Civil Rights Act in 1875 that guaranteed them equal access to public places⁴. In addition, Congress by the end of 1860s dissolved all the organizations that terrorized blacks including the KKK.

In the same vein, the Bureau's power was expanded in 1866, enabling it to enforce laws, punish crimes, use military force when necessary, and even to adjudicate cases wherein the rights of blacks were denied.⁵ Further, it passed "the Reconstruction Plan"⁶, which not only compartmentalized the Southern states into five military districts, placing each one under a military control, but also prohibited them from taking part in the Congress, unless they ratified the Fourteenth Amendment and created new constitutions akin to the one of the U.S.A.⁷

A new phase struck up. Blacks could excel in politics, vote and even be elected as senators and representatives. It is estimated that between 1868 and 1877 more than hundred blacks took part in state legislatures and local offices⁸. The table below pinpointed the number of black representatives in the Congress apropos of the percentage of their population in the Southern states in 1870.

¹ Coombs, 139.

² Holt, 34.

³ Thomas E. Patterson, *The American Democracy*, 3rd ed. (New York : McGraw-Hill Education, 1997), 131

⁴ Holt, 79.

⁵ Schneider and Carl J. Schneider, 350-356.

⁶ Kolchin, 211

⁷ Kolchin, 211.

⁸ Wallenfeldt, 59

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Table 01: Percentage of Blacks in the Southern States in 1870 and the Number of their Representatives

State	Black %	Senate	House	Total
South Carolina	59	0	8	8
Mississippi	54	2	1	3
Louisiana	50	0	1	1
Florida	49	0	1	1
Alabama	48	0	3	3
Georgia	46	0	1	1
Virginia	42	0	1	1
North Carolina	37	0	4	4
				22

Source: Laura Randall, *Changing Structure of Mexico: Political, Social, and Economic Prospects* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2006), 112.

Besides, blacks founded their own churches that served as a source of political, educational, social and spiritual support to the freed population. Moreover, with the assistance of the Freedmen's Bureau, they succeeded in establishing schools and universities to train black teachers, preachers and doctors including, Atlanta University, Fisk University in Nashville, and Howard University in Washington D.C¹. By 1869, black teachers' number topped² whites' in black schools, and their salary increased either³.

Blacks, therefore, could for the first time grasp the meaning of freedom which was soon cut by the election of the Republican President Rutherford B. Hayes (1822-1893) in 1877. Before this latter could attain this position, Democratic congressmen from the South and Republicans argued over the results of the presidential election. To appease

¹ Donna Lee Dickerson, *The Reconstruction Era: Primary Documents on Events from 1865 to 1877* (California: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2003), 31

² Paterson, 108.

³ Schneider and Carl J. Schneider, 356.

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the escalated dispute¹, a compromise was made wherein Democrats accepted the Republican Hayes to be the new president in return for the removal of federal troops from the Southern states, leaving blacks without protection from racist whites. By doing so, the Reconstruction Plan which was implemented by the Congress became invalid and the Southerners regained control over their states and, thus, over the freed blacks. This election marked the beginning of the takeover of blacks' gained rights. William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, a black Civil Rights leader, commented, "The slave went free: stood a brief moment in the sun; then moved back again toward slavery...a new slavery arose."²

Inevitably, blacks underwent another experience in their lives. Southerners strove as much as possible to maintain the inferiority of blacks as they had all the time considered them. Instead of enslavement, they availed themselves of discrimination, segregation, and lynching to subdue blacks and dispel their independency.

2.2. Blacks' Status in America after 1877 and up to the mid of the Twentieth Century

Southerners' attitudes against blacks stemmed from their long-held belief in the superiority of their race. They asserted that God chose them to be better than blacks³. Theodore Roosevelt (1858-1919) who was the President of America from 1901 till 1909 affirmed, "The African is a member of a perfect stupid race"⁴. Based on this vindication, Southerners seized the opportunity whenever it was possible to sideline blacks from being fully integrated in the American society. Colonel Samuel Thomas, an official with the Freedmen's Bureau insisted:

¹ Coombs, 148.

² W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America: Toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880* (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2013), 26.

³ Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *White Supremacy and Racism in the Post-civil Rights Era* (Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001), 147.

⁴ Cited in Coombs, 156.

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The whites esteem the blacks their property by natural right, and however much they may admit that the individual relations of masters and slaves have been destroyed by the war and the President's emancipation proclamation, they still have an ingrained feeling that the blacks at large belong to the whites at large, and whenever opportunity serves they treat the colored people just as their profit, caprice or passion may dictate.¹

Thereby, second-class citizens who could never be treated equally, was blacks' destiny brought by the Compromise of 1877 and the withdrawal of the Union soldiers from the South. Left without protection, blacks' achieved rights in the Reconstruction Era were confined and sometimes looted by the threefold system adopted by Southerners, including segregation, discrimination and lynching.

Under the "Jim Crow Laws"², which were enacted right after 1877, segregation became the norm being implemented in all aspects of life. Blacks were denied the right to have access to all the areas that pertained to whites. In bus transportation, for instance, they were not only inhibited from sitting in whites' sections, but also were harshly treated and assaulted by the white drivers³. In the educational sphere, separate institutions were founded with blacks' schools suffering from poor and inferior conditions⁴. When it came to jobs, blacks were the "last to be hired, and the first to be fired"⁵. Even in places such as parks and zoos, blacks' desire to enjoy their time would be soon extinguished once they came across such signs, "Negroes and Dogs Not Allowed"⁶

¹ Cited in Paul Finkelman, *Milestone Documents in African American History: Exploring the Essential Primary Sources* (Dallas: Schlager Group Inc., 2010), 615.

² The Jim Crow Laws refer to the laws that Southerners enacted to set blacks apart from the whites. They were implemented to force segregation in every place. The Jim Crow derived its name from a minstrel routine that was performed in 1828 to represent the typical Southern black and his daily life. Years later the use of the term shifted to describe the period that was predominated by segregation. In Faiza Meberbeche, "Pan Africanism and its impact on the Sierra Leonean elite up to 1945" (Doctorate thesis, university of Abou_bekr belkaid-Tlemcen, 2010), 67, and <https://www.britannica.com/event/Jim-Crow-law> (accessed April 15, 2016).

³ Lamia Bouabdallah, "Women's Struggle for Civil and Political Rights (1920-1960)" (Magister thesis, University of Oran, 2013), 76.

⁴ Meberbeche, 68.

⁵ Stuart Kallen, *The Civil Rights Movement* (Minnesota: ABDO, 2010), 5.

⁶ Leslie Vincent Tischauser, *Jim Crow Laws* (California: ABC-CLIO, 2012), 69.

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Working as an upholder of segregation, the Supreme Court proved to be of a great assistance to the Southerners' enacted laws. In 1883, the Civil Rights Act of 1875 that granted blacks equal rights in public places was declared unconstitutional, strengthening Southerners' attitudes. Add to this the adoption of "Separate but Equal" doctrine that was established with the decision made in Plessey V. Ferguson case¹, in 1896.

In the same vein, discrimination was apparent even in the way blacks were called. They had been nicknamed differently: "barbarian," "Negro ruffian," "African Annie," "colored cannibal," "coon," and "darkie"², to name but few. The prejudice was extended when news articles, magazines, literary works, and cartoons depicted them as lazy, superstitious, liars, and drunkards³.

Additionally, to undermine blacks' power, Southerners disenfranchised them by virtue of created obstacles. Poll tax crippled blacks from voting unless they made payment; Grandfather Clause excluded all those whose ancestors did not cast their ballot in 1867; literacy tests assessed their ability to read and write; White Primary gave the opportunity only to whites to vote in the Democratic Party. As a result, nearly no black could vote between the years of 1920 and 1946 in North Carolina⁴. In 1900, Louisiana witnessed the vote of only 5,320 blacks out of 130,344, and Alabama just 3,000 out of 181,471⁵.

What made matters worse was the terrifying atmosphere that blacks were living in on account of the re-emergence of the KKK in 1915, and the adoption of lynching as another racial method to prevent blacks from claiming their rights. Blacks were not killed because of committing serious felonies; rather, they were murdered for minor

¹ In 1896 in Louisiana, a black man named Plessey was jailed for he abstained sitting in a "coloured car". When the case was presented in the Supreme Court, this latter declared the Louisiana segregation to be constitutional and established the doctrine of "Separate but Equal". <http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/plessey-v-ferguson> (accessed April 18th, 2016)

² Coombs, 153.

³ Coombs, 153.

⁴ Patterson, 131.

⁵ Meberbeche, 66-67.

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crimes and trivial social transgressions. In 1899 in Mississippi, Keith Bowen, a black citizen, was lynched as he attempted to enter a room where three white women were sitting; in 1904 a mob in South Carolina killed a black man for he knocked a white woman's house door, and in 1940 in Alabama, another black citizen was executed because he called a white police officer by his name dropping the title of "mister"¹. To intimidate the rest of blacks, the victims were usually killed in public places and in front of all people. Ida B. Wells, an African-American Civil Rights activist and a journalist described the tyrannous nature of lynching when three innocent blacks were killed in the late of 1880s. She highlighted:

[The three blacks] had been lynched...with just as much as brutality as other victims of the mob; and they had committed no crime against white women. This is what opened my eyes to what Lynching really was. An excuse to get rid of Negroes who were acquiring wealth and property and thus keeping the race terrorized and 'keep the nigger down'².

Caught by the same zeitgeist, most of the Southern states espoused the use of lynching to enforce the Jim Crow laws and white supremacy. Consequently, the number of the killed blacks escalated. The table below gives the number of blacks who fell prey to lynching between 1877 and 1950 in twelve states in the South.

¹ Equal Justice Initiative, *Lynching in America: Confronting the Legacy of Racial Terror: Report Summary*, 10-11 <http://www.eji.org/files/EJI%20Lynching%20in%20America%20SUMMARY.pdf> (accessed April 18th, 2016)

² Cited in David T.Z. Mindich, *Just the Facts: How "Objectivity" Came to Define American Journalism* (New York: NYU Press, 2000), 120.

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Table 02: Blacks Lynching Victims by State, 1877-1950

Alabama	326	Total 3959
Arkansas	503	
Florida	331	
Georgia	586	
Kentucky	154	
Louisiana	540	
Mississippi	576	
North Carolina	102	
South Carolina	164	
Tennessee	225	
Texas	376	
Virginia	76	

Source: Equal Justice Initiative, 16.

Living under such a situation was not an easy task for blacks to bear. As a solution, some of them opted for migration. They set off leaving the South to the North for safety and better conditions. From 1913 to 1930, more than one million blacks migrated¹. The others, however, challenged the appropriation of their rights by implementing diverse ways², amongst was the establishment of organizations such as the foundation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1909, the National Urban League (NUL) in 1910, and the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in 1914.

Yet, after the Second World War (1939-1945), a new spirit of self-confidence and self-awareness begot, buttressing blacks' protest. While fighting in the British army, some blacks were recruited and received equal treatment³. Others, however,

¹ Kenneth Chay and Kaivan Munshi, *Black Networks After Emancipation: Evidence from Reconstruction and the Great Migration* (March, 2013), 7, http://economics.yale.edu/sites/default/files/chay_munshi_march2013.pdf (accessed April 18th, 2016)

² Blacks expressed their denial to the system of segregation differently. They sung freedom songs like *Oh Freedom, We Shall Overcome*, to name but few; painted, sculpted and photographed like Barbara Jones-Hogu (1938-) and Bob Thompson (1937-1966)...etc; crafted literary works or wrote in newspapers. In <http://kwanzaaguide.com/2010/04/freedom-songs-and-the-civil-rights-movement-2/>, <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/maai3/protest/text10/text10read.htm>, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/06/05/civil-rights-art_n_5420940.html, (accessed April 19th, 2016)

³ Paterson, 107.

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were treated better than them.¹ In November 1944, The editor of the African-American newspaper, *Pittsburgh Courier*, confirmed, "[the American] administration has treated prisoners of war [. . .] far better than it has treated Negro boys who are shedding their blood on far-flung battle fields in defense of America's Constitutional guarantees."² Hence, for blacks, democracy and equality were the rights being fought for while taken off from them by racists in their country, the land of liberty and equality as laid out in the American Declaration of Independence:

We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed, by their CREATOR, with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these Rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just Powers from the Consent of the Governed, that whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these Ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its Foundation on such Principles.³

Holding these principles while treating blacks otherwise induced the beginning of the modern Civil Rights Movement, known also as the “Second American Revolution”⁴, intensifying the efforts made to knock down the discriminatory system. For instance, the year 1942 witnessed the emergence of a new interracial group, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), which was better known for the use of non-violent methods to secure equal rights.⁵ Furthermore, the members of the NAACP, who adopted courtroom strategies in order to achieve civil rights for blacks, could

¹ Brogan, 622.

² Matthias Reiss, “Icons of Insult: German and Italian Prisoners of War in African American Letters during World War II”, *Amerikastudien / American Studies* Vol. 49, No. 4 (2004), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41158095> (accessed April 18th, 2016)

³ The Library of Congress: American Memory [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/bdsdcc:@field\(DOCID+@lit\(bdsdcc02101\)\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/bdsdcc:@field(DOCID+@lit(bdsdcc02101))) (accessed April 18th, 2016)

⁴ It was named as such since blacks decided to defy the system that treated them as second class citizens in Julian Bond, *Eyes on the prize: America's Civil Rights Movement 1954-1985, episode 01 Awakenings 1954-1956*, produced by Henry Hampton (originally aired 1987), 01:41. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ts10IVzUDVw> (accessed April 10, 2016).

⁵ http://kingencyclopedia.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_congress_of_racial_equality_core/ (accessed April 18th, 2016)

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successfully push the Supreme Court to declare the unconstitutionality of segregation in schools in the *Brown v. Board of Education* case in 1954¹.

Nonetheless, Southerners did not relinquish their spirit, and their discriminatory attitudes towards blacks became more apparent. Senator James Eastland from Mississippi represented one of the most obstinate segregationists who put their face against equality. He displayed this determination when he stated, “all the people of the South are in favor of segregation. And Supreme Court or no Supreme Court, we are going to maintain segregated schools down in Dixie.”² Additionally, in 1955 an event shocked the Americans. A fourteen-year-old boy, Emmet Till, was killed by two white men in the state of Mississippi for he attempted to tease a white woman³. Despite the mutilation of the body and the availability of eyewitnesses, the Court reached a verdict that acquitted the killers.⁴

Thereafter, blacks perceived the requisite need for the employment of a direct action along with the courtroom strategies to defy the Southerners’ system, and to crush the bulwark of segregation. Refusing to relinquish her seat to a white citizen, a black woman triggered the emergence of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), a new organization that would adopt the non-violent direct action method as its main weapon.

¹. In the early 1950s, NAACP lawyers filed lawsuits against segregation in schools, amongst was the *Brown v. Board of Education* against the Topeka, Kansas school board in which Oliver Brown, parent of one of the children who were prevented from entering the Topeka's white schools, was used as a representative-plaintiff. When the federal district court refused Brown’s claim that the school in Topeka violated the equal protection clause in the Fourteenth Amendment, NAACP appealed to the Supreme Court that eventually ruled in favor of Oliver Brown and prohibited segregation in public schools in 1954,

http://www.pbs.org/wnet/supremecourt/rights/landmark_brown.html (accessed April 19th, 2016).

² Bond, *Eyes on the prize: America’s Civil Rights Movement 1954-1985, episode 01 Awakenings 1954–1956*, 02:47.

³ Emert Phyllis Raybin, “Delayed Justice: Reopening the Emmett Till Murder Case”, *Respect: a Newsletter about law and Diversity* Vol. 4, No. 3 (2005),

<https://www.njsbf.org/images/content/1/1/11130/Respect%20Spring%202005.pdf> (accessed April 17,2016)

⁴ Emert.

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3. The Emergence of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference

Considered to be “The Cradle of the Confederacy”¹, Montgomery, Alabama in the 1950s was one of the most salient segregated cities in the South of the U.S.A, embracing 48,000 blacks out of 120,000 citizens². Whites’ racial laws were stringent to the point that even playing cards or checkers was prohibited between blacks and whites³. Similarly, the Montgomery bus system was not bereft of segregation. Blacks were not allowed to sit in the first four front rows, and when the bus was full, they surrendered their seats in the back to the whites. Filled with the glimmer of hope brought by the Brown v. Board of Education decision in 1954, and fed up with the status quo Rosa Parks, a black woman, determinedly, refused to give up her seat on December 1, 1955. Her firm answer, “I don’t think I should have to stand up”⁴, resulted in jailing her. When she was asked about her action, she replied, “I was determined to achieve the total freedom that our history lessons taught us we were entitled to... no matter what the sacrifice”⁵.

Upon hearing of the arrest, Edgar Daniel Nixon president of the NAACP’s chapter in Montgomery along with Jo Ann Robinson, an active member of The Women’s Political Council⁶ (WPC) decided to use Rosa Parks as a plaintiff to repeal segregation on the buses, and mobilize blacks’ protest. “Mrs. Parks had the caliber of character we needed to get the city to rally behind us”⁷, Ann Robinson emphasized. Thus, to secure the involvement of all blacks, Ann Robinson ran off

¹ Robert E. Jakoubek and Heather Lehr Wagner, *Martin Luther King, Jr.: civil rights leader* (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2009), 32.

² . Jakoubek, 32.

³ Margaret Davidson, *I have a Dream: The Story of Martin Luther* (New York: Scholastic INC, 1986), 41.

⁴ Cited in Alan C. McLean, *Martin Luther King* (England: Oxford university press, 2008), 18.

⁵ Cited in Ruth Ashby, *Rosa Parks: Freedom Rider* (New York: Sterling Publishing Company, Inc., 2008), 64.

⁶ The Women’s Political Council (WPC) of Montgomery, Alabama, was established in 1946 by Mary Fair Burks and succeeded by Jo Ann Robinson in 1950. The group’s aim was to increase blacks’ political and social power, http://kingencyclopedia.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_womens_political_council.1.html (accessed April 17, 2016)

⁷ Cited in David J. Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (New York: Quill William Morrow, 1999), 16.

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40,000 handbills,¹ calling for a bus boycott. Correspondingly, meetings were held to organize the boycott, and Edgar Daniel Nixon called for the assistance of Martin Luther King, Jr.² (1929-1968), who was working at that time as a pastor in the Dexter Baptist Church in Montgomery. Together, in 1955, they formed the Montgomery Improvement Association organization (MIA) which worked as upholder, director and organizer of the boycott. Elected as its head, Martin Luther King, Jr. emboldened blacks to display their anger peacefully and to eschew from using violence as reprisal. Over and over, he asserted:

Violence must not come from any of us, for if we become victimized with violence intents, we will have walked in vain...as we go back to the buses let us be loving enough to turn an enemy into friend... We seek an integration based on a mutual respect³.

Martin Luther King, Jr. was interested in turning the tide of public opinion in blacks' favor by exhibiting blacks' peacefulness against whites' brutality. Thereby, nonviolence was the backbone of the boycott which ended successfully. On December 21, 1956, the Supreme Court declared the unconstitutionality of segregation in the Montgomery bus system⁴. Nevertheless, the racist whites stood their grounds. They would take any action deemed necessary to preclude blacks from tasting the meaning of desegregation. On this point Martin Luther King, Jr. commented:

¹ Adam Fairclough, "The Preachers and the People: The Origins and Early Years of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, 1955-1959", *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 52, No. 3 (Aug., 1986), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2209569> (accessed April 18, 2016)

² Born on January 15, 1929 in Atlanta, Georgia, Martin Luther King rose to be one of the most prominent leaders and spokespersons who strove to put an end to the segregation phenomenon in the South of America. He was a Baptist minister and a social activist who was known for his advocacy of peace and nonviolent tactics which led him to win the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964. He pursued his dream of prompting blacks' lives until he was assassinated on April 4, 1968 in Memphis, Tennessee. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Martin-Luther-King-Jr> (accessed April 6, 2016)

³ Martin Luther King, *Statement by the President of the Montgomery Improvement Association*, December, 20, 1956, <http://www.thekingcenter.org/archive/document/statement-president-montgomery-improvement-association-0#> (accessed April 18, 2016)

⁴ Karen Latchana Kenney, *Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycott* (Minnesota: ABDO, 2015), 41.

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And then we started our struggle together... after the white people...started doing some nasty things. They started making some nasty telephone calls, and it came to the point that some days more than forty telephone calls would come in, threatening my life, the life of my family, the life of my child. I took it for a while, in a strong manner¹.

However, blacks did not bow out of the movement. The success of the bus boycott left them fraught with hope, courage, self-awareness and confidence to carry on their struggle. The more whites were prone to terrorism, the more blacks stood firm, as a black janitor in Montgomery told a white northern reporter, “we got our heads up now, and we won’t ever bow down again –no, sir- except before God!”² . Thereby, additional bus boycotts spread across the South. In the meantime, three New Yorkers activists and advocates of the non-violent strategy, Bayard Rustin³, Ella Josephine Baker⁴, and Stanley David Levison⁵, came to Montgomery and offered their help to Martin Luther King. They were caught by the blacks’ peaceful resistance and sought to duplicate the victory of the Montgomery Bus Boycott all over the South. Thus, with Martin Luther King, they discussed the possibility of coordinating all the movements by dint of founding a new organization that would have its root in the church and adopt the non-violent mass action to overthrow racial segregation all across the South.

¹ Cited in David J. Garrow, “Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Spirit of Leadership”, *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 74, No. 2 (Sep., 1987), pp. 438-447, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1900031> (accessed April 19, 2016).

² Cited in John A. Kirk, *Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement* (London: Routledge, 2014), 33.

³ Bayard Rustin (1910-1987) was an African America Civil Rights activist who was born in New York and exercised his work there. He was a committed advocated of the pacifist resistance and when he perceived that Martin Luther King held the same beliefs, he did not hesitate to push him to form a new organization to fight segregation nonviolently. From 1941 to 1953, he worked in the Fellowship of Reconciliation organization and in 1941, he helped in forming the New York branch of CORE. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Bayard-Rustin> (accessed April 19, 2016)

⁴ As one of the Civil Rights activists, Ella Josephine Baker (1903-1986) joined the staff of the NAACP as an assistant field secretary and later as director of branches, but resigned in 1946 and came back in as the president of the New York City branch. In 1956, along with Bayard Rustin and Stanley David Levison, she formed a new organization, In Friendship, that served to offer financial aid to the activists and organizations in the South. Although she helped in establishing SCLC, she kept criticizing its structure and leadership, http://kingencyclopedia.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_baker_ella_josephine_1903_1986/ (accessed April 19, 2016)

⁵ Unlike his counterparts, Stanley David Levison (1912-1979) was a white man who helped in raising funds to back up the bus boycott in Montgomery. He developed a close relationship with Martin Luther King, Jr. and intensely supported his activism, http://kingencyclopedia.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_levison_stanley_1912_1979/ (accessed April 19, 2016)

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Rustin contended that both NAACP and CORE lacked the ability to promote mass action and both of them were northern-based organizations, and had interracial leadership,¹ so the need to forge a different group was necessary.

As a result, initial meetings were held on January 10-11, 1957, at Ebenezer Baptist Church Atlanta. Sixty persons from ten states assembled². The discussion was mapped out by seven working papers written by Rustin wherein he laid great stress on forming the new organization on the basis of Christian principles, adopting the non-violent direct action, mass meetings in the church and unified leadership³. Besides, he pointed at the importance of transcending bus boycotts to launching a campaign that would abrogate blacks' disfranchisement by means of peaceful mass confrontations in lieu of relying only on courtroom strategies⁴. The participants agreed that "the only force capable of liberating blacks were the blacks themselves rather than the congress, courts or executive branch of government"⁵. The meetings resulted in the foundation of the Southern Leadership Conference on Transportation and Nonviolent Integration. The attendees issued a document, "*The Statement to the South and Nation*" which covered the following points: the organization would be led only by blacks who should fight to secure justice and reject segregation, the insistence on adopting the nonviolent strategy no matter how the whites' provocation might be, the church would be responsible for mobilizing blacks and endowing them with moral outlooks, and finally the members issued a moral appeal to both the white Southerners of a good will to help in treating blacks equally, and the president to take concrete actions that would bulldoze the segregationists into adhering to the Supreme Court decisions and altering their racial attitudes towards blacks⁶.

¹ Fairclough, "The Preachers and the People: The Origins and Early Years of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference", 423.

²<http://sclcnational.org/our-history/> (accessed April 19, 2016).

³ Bayard Rustin, *Working papers*, January 10 - 11, 1957, Ebenezer Baptist Church, Atlanta, Georgia.

⁴ Rustin.

⁵ Aldon D. Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986), 106.

⁶ The Southern leaders on transportation and non-violent integration, *A statement to the South and Nation*, Atlanta, 1957, 2:6, <http://www.thekingcenter.org/archive/document/statement-south-and-nation-0#> (accessed April 19, 2016).

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In its second meeting on February 14, 1957, Executive Board of Directors, and elected officers were established. They agreed that the board would assemble twice yearly to discuss matters, and a convention would be set to meet annually¹. Martin Luther King, Jr. was chosen to be the president of the organization. On its first annual convention in August, 1957, he suggested the inclusion of the word “Christian” to display the moral aspect of the organization and give it “the aura of a religious crusade.”² Ever since, the organization was named as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference holding the motto, “To Redeem the Soul of America”³, and had its headquarters in the state of Atlanta. Furthermore, in 1957, the constitution and by-laws of the organization were released in a pamphlet form, putting flesh on the skeleton and aims of the SCLC.

3.1. The Structure and Aim of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference

Paradoxical as it may appear, SCLC, from its inception, was aimed to be distinct from the other organizations while not yielding a competitive spirit. Rather, it sought to boost collaboration that would result in uplifting blacks’ status and decimating the system of segregation. Thereof, members were not in form of individuals. Alternatively, SCLC opted for being “an umbrella organization joined by local groups or affiliates in a loose alliance”⁴. Groups and organizations of all kinds, regardless of race and religion, who held purpose and methods analogous to the SCLC’s, not only could receive a certificate of affiliation signed by Martin Luther King, Jr. if they paid twenty-five dollars as membership fee, but also could send five delegates to the annual convention⁵. Affiliates were important for they could set the stage for local movements with the supervision of SCLC who bore the task of linking the various

¹ Southern Christian Leadership Conference, *This is SCLC*, (Georgia: 1960), 1.

² John D’Emilio, *Lost Prophet: The Life and Times of Bayard* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003), 226.

³ Kirk, 40.

⁴ Hung Yu-Ju, “Martin Luther King Jr. and Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) in the American Social Movement: the review and examination of To Redeem the Soul of America”, *International Journal of Liberal Arts and Social Science ISSN: 2307-924X Vol. 3 No. 7 (September, 2015)*, www.ijlass.org (accessed April 19, 2016).

⁵ Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 33.

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leaders for better coordination. Pastor of the Gillfield Baptist Church in Petersburg, Virginia, affiliated his church in 1957 for he believed that” affiliates knew their communities better than anyone else could ever know them.”¹

Actually, little had been reported about the inner, detailed structure of the SCLC except that it was governed by an executive board of thirty-three blacks from the South² under the leadership of Martin Luther King. Nevertheless, from its outset, SCLC was dominated by its president who took charge of every single detail. Ella Baker complained constantly that “[SCLC was] a King-centered structure”³. She was not the only one who held this opinion. Rustin explained how the structure of SCLC was built around King only:

Like the black church, the structure of the SCLC was autocratic...major decisions rested with Dr.King. He determined when and where an action would take place, what tactics would be employed, when a campaign should be accelerated, and when compromises should be made⁴.

Even so, a great deal of fund-raising hinged on King’s oratory skills. Through his speeches, he could appeal to a myriad of people, impelling them to help financially. It was asserted that “King possessed a well-honed ability to size up an audience, to know what to say and how to say it.”⁵ The rest of the SCLC’s budget was gleaned by virtue of mass rallies that were organized by the church, direct mailing fund appeals, individuals and organizational contributions, and affiliate fees. Hence, SCLC’s image melted into Martin Luther King’s. Most of the subject matter in hand that targeted SCLC spotlighted Martin Luther King, Jr. and attributed all the achievements to his presence. However, whoever was more accentuated, SCLC’s members coalesced with each other over mutual aims. From the onset, they were cognizant of the fact that their

¹Morris, 91.

² Kirk, 40.

³ Cited in Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 404.

⁴ Cited in Francesca Polletta, *Freedom Is an Endless Meeting: Democracy in American Social Movements* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 40.

⁵ Cited in Eric J. Sundquist, *From: King’s Dream* (London: Yale University Press, 2009), 20.

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mission was an extension of their ancestor's, as Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth, Civil Rights leader, accentuated, "[SCLC was based] on everything happened in the past-Frederick Douglass, slaves, and Marcus Garvey; everybody who struggled for freedom and who were caught up in the same web. And we were giving it an upward thrust."¹

While their predecessors sought for freedom by annihilating the system of slavery that they were trapped inside, SCLC's founders aimed to give sense to this freedom by joining local movements under its framework to fight nonviolently for desegregation and attain full citizenship rights. Since the crux of their mission was to defy the antithesis to the American ideal of democracy, SCLC's founders longed for engendering a new community, "the beloved community"², wherein neither side would be deemed racially superior; rather, relationship between blacks and whites would be swathed in reciprocal respect and love. Therefore its strategies reflected its adherence to the philosophy of nonviolence

3.2. The Philosophy and Strategies of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference

From the outset, SCLC pledged itself to the adoption of nonviolent philosophy wherein, "Not one hair of one head of one white person [should] be harmed"³ as confirmed by its leader who was a tireless advocate of the pacifist protests, and strove to get it entrenched and espoused by all the members of SCLC not only for their fights against racism, but as their lifeblood. He emphasized:

I am convinced beyond the shadow of a doubt that the philosophy of nonviolence will redeem the soul of America...This is one of the chief aims of the [SCLC]: to broadly disseminate through intensive training the heart of nonviolence, that our commitment to

¹ Jeffrey C. Alexander, *The Civil Sphere* (England: Oxford University Press, 2008), 282.

² Southern Christian Leadership Conference, *This is SCLC*, 3.

³ The Southern leaders on transportation and non-violent integration, 4.

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nonviolence will not only be a technique, but shall become for us a way of life with love and redemption as its center¹.

Martin Luther King's interest and understanding of the nonviolent philosophy stemmed from the years he spent reading about Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948), the Indian political leader of the Indian Independence movement against Britain during the first half of the twentieth century. Love, peace, and nonviolence constitute the *Satyagraha*, Gandhi's belief of "ceaseless and relentless pursuit of truth without resorting to hatred"², and the basis on which the British rule was cut off from India in 1947. Martin Luther King, Jr. adopted the same belief while mingling it with Christian principles, making SCLC as a church and not a mere organization"³. Thus, when trying to name the SCLC, the founders assented to include the word Christian to accentuate the pivotal role that was played by the church in the blacks' struggle which included mobilizing protestors and supporting them spiritually and financially.

Besides, Martin Luther King, Jr. was strongly driven by his faith. While fighting to topple segregation of buses in Montgomery, he experienced a moment of despair. His life and that of his surroundings were intimidated over and over by the racist whites; fear permeated Martin's soul and spirit of surrender roamed around him. Ostensibly, slough of despondency was not easy to be weeded out. However, Martin later recounted how a strong, internal stimulus pushed him to hold out, and gave him the sense that his fight against segregation was a mission of God against evil. He reported:

And I got to the point that I couldn't take it anymore. I was weak...I prayed a prayer, and I prayed out loud that night...I could hear an inner voice saying to me, "Martin Luther, stand up for righteousness...for justice...for truth. And I will be with you". I heard the voice of Jesus saying still to fight on. He promised never to leave me alone.⁴

¹ Martin Luther King, *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr., Volume V: Threshold of a New Decade, January 1959-December 1960*, ed. Clayborne Carson, Peter Holloran, Ralph Luker, and Penny A. Russell (California: University of California press, 2005), 517.

² Anil Dutta Mishra, *Gandhism after Gandhi* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1999), 124.

³ Yu-Ju, 83.

⁴ Cited in Toby Mac, Michael Tait, and LeAnna Willis, *Under God* (Michigan: Bethany House, 2004),239.

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These words echoed constantly in Martin's ears. In fact, according to Christianity, Jesus suffered innocently for the others; he was crucified to purify humanity from Adam's sin. Albeit, he was wrongly condemned, he kept commanding Christians, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you"¹. Interweaving this belief with Gandhi's *Satyagraha*, Martin deduced that laudable political and social changes would be successfully brought by the espousal of nonviolence and the acceptance of suffering. He asserted on confronting the physical force by the soul force in order to shake the enemy's conscience. He declared, "we will not hate you...We will soon wear you down by our capacity to suffer. And in winning our freedom we will so appeal to your heart and conscience that we will win you in the process."²

Therefore, blacks were mobilized to fight segregation peacefully; to drift away from using violence, be it spiritual or physical, no matter how exasperate whites would be; to suffer without retaliation. By doing so, blacks would be victimized and the opponents would be portrayed as "villains"³; their struggle would be deemed as a moral issue and the federal government would be catalyzed to cave in their demands. Further, responding peacefully to violent racists was for SCLC a robust tool to win the tug of war over bridging the divides between blacks and racist whites and restoring the ties of brotherhood.

However, for the nonviolent philosophy to be effective, SCLC abided itself by the implementation of the direct action method that depended first on the power of delivering speeches. For instance, Martin Luther King's oratory skills played a seminal role in the struggle against segregation. Astutely, he used his ability to appease the

¹ Cited in Matthew 5:38-48 cited in Kk Kuriakose, *Nonviolence: The Way of the Cross* (Florida:Xulon Press, 2004), 133.

² Cited in Ratana Dāsa, *The Global Vision Of Mahatma Gandhi* (New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 2005), 297.

³ Abdel Samad Sherif, "Non-violence in the Civil Rights Movement in the United States of America", (Phd dissertation, Freie Universität Berlin, 2009), 103.

http://www.diss.fuberlin.de/diss/servlets/MCRFileNodeServlet/FUDISSL_derivate_00000005337/Non-violence.pdf (accessed April 20, 2016)

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fierce blacks, and engage even whites to fight in their favour. His speech was used as a point of departure to launch any action by interpreting the situation appropriately as to secure the help and involvement of many people. His speaking ability was described by Rufus Lewis (1906-1999), one of the Civil Rights activists, as follows:

He was such an outstanding. He could make you feel what he was saying, as well as hearing what he was saying. He was sincere and dedicated. And he could lift you out your seat. You couldn't just be quiet...it was such a stirring thing...I can't say much more than that, because it was such a stimulating thing. And he was carried away with his own speech¹.

Thus, according to the aforementioned testimony, Martin Luther King's speech had the potential to hold the audience spellbound. On January 30, 1956 while he was preaching at Dexter Church in Montgomery, a bomb targeted his house wherein his wife and daughter were. Fortunately, they were not hurt, but a riot broke out, calling for an immediate reprisal. Attempts of police to placate the fierce mob were to no avail. Martin Luther King, through his speech and eloquence, successfully accomplished the job though the targeted house with the insiders was his. A police officer confessed how besotted with the speech was the case of those who listened to him, he stated, "if it hadn't been for that nigger preacher, we'd all be dead."²

Secondly, SCLC relied on marches. Since freedom of assembly was a right endowed by the first American Amendment³, SCLC adopted marches and demonstrations, for thirty to forty-five days⁴, to drag racist whites to the battle and provoke their violence. This direct method hinged upon the segregationists' reaction. If the peaceful blacks' march was met violently, media would find a spicy topic to tackle, portraying blacks as victims felling prey to tyrants' behavior. Inevitably, public

¹ Cited in Bond, *Eyes on the prize: America's Civil Rights Movement 1954-1985, episode 01 Awakenings 1954-1956*, 42:08.

² Cited in Dale Evva Gelfand and Lisa Renee Rhodes , *Coretta Scott King: Civil Rights Activist* (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2009), 57.

³ Holt, 34.

⁴ Michael J. Nojeim , *Gandhi and King: The Power of Nonviolent Resistance* (California: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2004), 218.

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opinion would be attracted, compelling the federal government to have the problem fixed right away. Nojeim pinpointed, “marches dramatized evil and racist practices and mobilized forces of goodwill to generate pressure for peaceful change.”¹

Thirdly, the direct action method was displayed by the adoption of boycotts to shake the economy of a specific city, thrusting government upon taking action. For instance, achieving desegregation in Montgomery buses would not be obtained without the implementation of the boycott as a method of protest. However, its use would succeed with the selection of the most appropriate city in which blacks owned a noticeable buying-power to be able to paralyze the economy there. For example, in Montgomery, seventy-five percent² of blacks used bus system. When the boycott was launched, it highly impinged on bus companies and paralyzed them, providing the main impetus for change.

Finally, SCLC used sit-ins method. As its name alludes, sit-ins required blacks to challenge segregation by deliberately sitting in places where the Jim Crow Laws were employed. By doing so, blacks demonstrated their rugged stance towards being treated unevenly and instigated segregationists’ violence. Breaking states’ rules by sitting in whites’ places, blacks would risk being incarcerated. However, thronging jails with blacks was the sought after aim, rather than being an act to be afraid of. Pacifically adopted, both sit-ins and jail-ins would catch the attention of media and public opinion to put great pressure on the government, chiefly if violence was the method resorted to by segregationists and the prisoners were either eminent leaders like Martin, or old women and children.

Patently, by employing the non-violent direct action method, SCLC set itself apart from the precedent organizations. As pointed earlier, NAACP, for example, favoured challenging segregation in courts. Martin Luther King, as the president of SCLC, did not gainsay the significance of the courtroom strategies, but he indicated

¹ Nojeim, 218.

² <http://www.crf-usa.org/black-history-month/social-protests> (accessed April 20, 2016)

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how the stage can successfully be set for their use by the implementation of direct method as a first step. He clarified:

You may well ask: "Why direct action? Why sit-ins, marches and so forth? Isn't negotiation a better path?"... Indeed, this is the very purpose of direct action. [It] seeks to create such a crisis...that a community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks so to dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignore... we who engage in nonviolent direct action are not the creators of tension. We merely bring to the surface the hidden tension that is already alive. We bring it out in the open, where it can be seen and dealt with¹.

It is worth mentioning, that until 1963, the above mentioned methods and structure were subject to constant elaboration and refinement as they were put into practice. SCLC undertook different campaigns. It learnt from success and much more from failure.

4. The Activism of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference up to 1963

SCLC's activism started by the Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom, also known as the Prayer Pilgrimage to Washington. It was the first opportunity for SCLC to appear on the scene of the battle, putting Martin Luther King, Jr. at the center stage. Originally organized by the Civil Rights leader Asa Philip Randolph² and assisted by NAACP and SCLC, the demonstration was set on May 17, 1957 as a response to the President Eisenhower's rebuff to take action against the racists who refused to adhere to the Supreme Court decision that inhibited segregation in public schools. The march attracted the presence of 25.000 people³. Although Martin Luther King, Jr. was not the only speaker, his speech stood out from the crowd as he mesmerized the

¹ Martin Luther King, Jr., *Letter from Birmingham City Jail*, (Birmingham: 1963), 5-8.

<http://www.thekingcenter.org/archive/document/letter-birmingham-city-jail-0#> (accessed April, 19, 2016).

² Asa Philip Randolph (1889- 1979) was a famous leader and Civil Rights activist, known for his battle against segregation in the armed forces and for establishing the first African American labor union, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, in 1937, <http://www.biography.com/people/a-philip-randolph-9451623#early-life> (accessed April 20, 2016)

³ Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 40.

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audience. Furthermore, it spotlighted his presence as described by the *New York City's Amsterdam News* on February 18, 1957, "The No. 1 of 16 million Negroes...who will be followed anywhere"¹. Echoed repeatedly in the people's ears, "Give us the Ballot" was the title given to Martin Luther King's delivered speech in which he seized the opportunity to reveal his intention of vying for the enfranchisement of blacks, "Give us the ballot, and we will no longer have to worry the federal government about our basic rights."²

However, when this intention was turned into a tangible action, by launching SCLC's first initiative in late 1957, the Crusade for Citizenship, failure was the outcome and blacks remained disfranchised. Historian Fairclough attributed much of this negative result to the SCLC's weak structure, lack of internal communications, Martin Luther King's administrative inexperience, financial obstacles, and fear of some blacks to embrace direct action and be jailed³.

Thus, until 1960, SCLC devoted its efforts to reorganize its structure. In 1959, Martin Luther King, Jr. resigned from his job as a pastor in the Dexter Church in Montgomery to give SCLC his full attention. When four black students in Greensboro, North Carolina adopted the sit-in movement to defy segregation in a lunch counter, SCLC gave them a helping hand. Peacefully held, the movements spread all over the South thrusting SCLC to aid in founding the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), aiming to make it as its youth division. However, SNCC preferred to be an autonomous organization of its own, far from SCLC's control.

Following the foundation of the new coalition, SCLC took part in the Albany Campaign in 1961. It was its second opportunity to put its strategies under test. The

¹ Cited in Mervyn A. Warren, *King Came Preaching: The Pulpit Power of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 41.

² Martin cited in Pohlmann, 20.

³ Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 48-54.

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purpose of the campaign was to end segregation in the entire city. Though King effectively mobilized blacks to conduct nonviolent marches and he, personally, was imprisoned, the campaign fizzled out. Neither the weak SCLC's structure, nor its financial problems constituted the reasons behind the campaign's failure, but the astuteness of the Albany's chief of police, Laurie Pritchett. This latter planned carefully for the faceoff. He recounted, "I did research; I found his [King] method was nonviolence, that his method was to fill the jail, same as Gandhi in India. And once they filled the jails, we'd have no capacity to arrest and then we'd have to give in to his demands."¹

Securing the non-interference of the media in the battle, Laurie Pritchett made sure not to use violence, not to fill the jails and to get King out of prison as soon as possible. Failure, thus, was the inevitable outcome. The campaign of Albany was described by newspapers as, "The one of the most stunning defeats of King's career...devastating loss of face."² Replete with despair, SCLC left Albany in 1962. However, this experience would be the main reason behind the success of the following campaign that was held in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1963.

The Albany movement taught SCLC to focus its goals. Instead of targeting segregation in the entire city, it would be preferable to start with minor aims to ease the task. It is reckoned that the Albany Campaign petered out since it "aimed at everything in general and nothing in particular."³ Moreover, the success of nonviolent strategies rested upon using violence from the part of the opponent. Hence, the choice of the suitable city proved to be of a crystal importance. Consequently, Birmingham was the next target wherein the easy to be irritated was present, the chief of police Bull Connor.

¹ Julian Bond, *Eyes on the prize: America's Civil Rights Movement 1954-1985, episode 04 No Easy Walk 1961-1963*, produced by Henry Hampton (originally aired 1987), 12:30.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=suP5ILiOIEY> (accessed April 10, 2016).

² James Waller, *Prejudice Across America* (Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2009), 181.

³ Abdel Samad, 228.

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Started with economic boycotts, followed by sit-ins and mass marches, ended with thronging jails with blacks, and bolstered by Martin Luther King's letter from Birmingham city jail, the campaign was able to stalemate the city's economy and draw the public opinion. When children joined the demonstrations, Bull Connor ordered the use of dogs and huge water hoses to knock them into the ground. Footages of the scene spread all over America, stirring up the anger of President John Fitzgerald Kennedy (1917-1963), who assumed presidency from 1961 till 1963, to send a Civil Right Bill to the Congress asking for equality. He vocalized:

I shall ask the Congress of the United States to act, to make a commitment it has not fully made in this century to the proposition that race has no place in American life or law... I am, therefore, asking the Congress to enact legislation giving all Americans the right to be served in facilities which are open to the public—hotels, restaurants, theatres, retail stores, and similar establishments¹.

To keep the pressure up and push for the bill to become a law, Martin Luther King, Jr. organized a march in the Summer of 1963 to Washington DC. In front of Lincoln Memorial, he delivered one of his most brilliant speeches, "I Have a Dream" that casted spells on more than 250.000 listeners, and gave fame to his organization.²

5. Conclusion

To sum up, the foundation of SCLC did not emerge out of the blue, rather from blacks' realization that the discriminatory system that they were living in would never be a fact of life. Albeit SCLC was preceded by the foundation of other organizations, its birth banked on the embracement of the nonviolent direct action to defy the regime of segregation. It favoured being an umbrella, encompassing groups as affiliates whatever their faiths, religions, creeds and race would be. Founded in 1957 and led by Martin Luther King, Jr., SCLC suffered from successive defeats during its early years

¹ John F. Kennedy, *Report to the American People on Civil Rights* (originally aired June 11, 1963), 07:30, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QMsa5bZ89x4> (accessed April, 16 2016)

² Davidson, 93.

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as it was a new organization, lacking experience and strong organizational structure. It was not until 1963 that it could effectively contribute to the passage of the Civil Rights Bill, prohibiting segregation in public accommodations. Consequently, locals in Selma, Alabama, appealed for its help to save the campaign they launched in 1963 from failure. Answering their call, SCLC joined the campaign in 1964. Before having an access to the role played by SCLC in Selma and its impact, it is worth delving in the period that preceded its contribution which will be the task of the upcoming chapter.



Chapter Two

**The Selma Campaign before the Involvement of
the Southern Christian Leadership Conference**

(1963-1964)

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1. Introduction

On the basis of race, blacks in Alabama were tightly wrapped in segregation, as in all the other American Southern states. From the end of the Reconstruction Era, in 1877, discrimination in every aspect of life was the status that blacks were compelled to accept just because they were blacks and descendents of former slaves. With the presence of obstinate segregationists, racism was predominant and blacks were marginalized. Racist whites strove to preserve their superiority and dampen blacks' power, if not to snuff it out completely, chiefly after the success brought by the bus boycott in Montgomery in 1955 and the Birmingham Campaign in 1963. Politically, the Jim Crow laws helped in legalizing discrimination and enforcing white supremacy, and sections from the constitution of Alabama backed up segregationists' attitudes by paving the way for them to employ diverse methods to inhibit blacks from having an access to the ballot.

Therefore, in 1963, members of the SNCC came to the Selma city to help activists from the Dallas County Voters League (DCVL)¹ in launching a campaign to register black voters. They wished to bring a change that would affect blacks in Selma and all the Southern states as well. After conducting a hard work, they succeeded in mobilizing blacks, but by the end of 1964, segregationists' incessant resistance handicapped their progress. Their efforts went unheeded, and they failed in attaining tangible results. Hoped to push the campaign forward, the DCVL turned towards Martin Luther King, SCLC's leader, for help. In this respect, the kernel of the present chapter is to go through the reasons of both launching the campaign in 1963 and its failure in the end of 1964 as to understand the whys and wherefores of the SCLC's involvement in Selma.

¹ The Dallas County Voters League is a local organization, originally founded in mid-1920s under the leadership of Charles J. Adams to help blacks get their right of voting. <http://civilrightsteaching.org/resource/dallas-county-voters-league/> (accessed May 11, 2016)

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2. Selma, Alabama: an Overview

Situated in the south central of Alabama, Selma by 1963 was the seventh largest city in population¹ and the seat of the Dallas County (See Map 01). Additionally, it was one of the most notable cities in the U.S.A Black Belt region. Geologically, the Black Belt referred to the most important agricultural area in the South of U.S.A that was characterized by its dark and fertile soil. In their book, *The Oxford Handbook of Southern Politics*, published in 2012, historians Charles S. Bullock III and Mark J. Rozellan attempted to delineate the exact location of the Black Belt by providing different opinions, including on the one hand those who described the region as an area in the form of a rough crescent, stretching from the Carolinas to Georgia, Alabama, and into Mississippi, and on the other hand those who limited the region to parts of Alabama, Mississippi, and Texas². Though views differed about the precise stretch of the area, they concurred in locating it in the South of the U.S.A.

Map 01: Alabama County Map with County Seat Cities in the Twentieth Century



Source: <http://www.mapofus.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/20659-050-FCCD86B3.jpg> (accessed May 10, 2016)

¹ Bruce Gordon, *Field Report* (Selma, November 9, 1963), 1. http://www.crmvet.org/lets/631109_sncc_selma_gordon.pdf (accessed May 11, 2016)

² Charles S. Bullock III and Mark J. Rozell, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Southern Politics*, 1st ed. (England: Oxford University Press, 2012), 256.

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Demographically, the Black Belt indicated the Southern states that embodied large number of blacks, descendants of former slaves. Till 1865, economic prosperity was the chief driving force that propelled the inhabitants of these states to rely heavily on the plantation work under the slavery regime. The African American writer Booker T. Washington, who spent most of his adolescence in the South of U.S.A, gave a broad definition of this term in his 1971 work, *Up from Slavery: An Autobiography*. He went beyond its geological aspect to the reasons behind naming this region as such. According to him, the Black Belt shifted from being a name of a dark, rich soil to a land wrapping up a large number of blacks. He spelled out:

the term was first used to designate a part of the country, which was distinguished by the color of the soil...possessing ... thick, dark and naturally rich soil ...where the slaves were most profitable, and consequently they were taken there in the largest numbers. Later... the term seems to be used wholly in a political sense: that is, to designate counties where the black people outnumber the white¹.

Over time, the Black Belt term became used to describe the region of Alabama because this latter had both the ideal darkest soil for cultivating cotton and the largest black population. It was estimated that 75% of the Black Belt lay in Alabama². Paradoxically, Dallas County was in the heartland of the Black Belt with large number of black population felling prey under whites' racial system.

Albeit blacks' number topped whites', whites' persistence to preserve their supremacy was palpable. By 1963 Dallas County was composed of 30,000 blacks and less than 25, 000 whites³. Nevertheless, segregation was prevalent. As a matter of fact, Selma was the seat of the Dallas County and the unofficial political economic and

¹ Cited in Charles Joan, *Ella Baker and the SNCC: Grassroots Leadership and Political Activism in a Nonhierarchical Organization* (Saarbrücken :VDM Verlag, 2009), 111.

² Boyd Childress, "Black Belt", in *Slavery in the United States: A Social, Political, and Historical Encyclopedia, Volume 1*, ed. Junius P. Rodriguez (California: ABC-CLIO, 2007), 190

³ Howard Zinn, "Registration in Alabama", *The New Republic Magazine*, October 26, 1963. http://www.crmvet.org/info/63_selma_zinn.pdf, (accessed May 11, 2016).

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cultural capital of the Western part of the Alabama's Black Belt¹; therefore, it could not escape the winds of change that blew all the Southern states right after the end of the American Civil War. As elucidated in the first chapter, blacks' freedom was intermittent. After 1865, slavery system was crushed. Blacks would no more slog away at the plantation work for their landowners. For ten years, they got a free hand in exercising some of their rights like the access to the educational and political spheres. Yet, when the American South regained its power after 1877, the advent of a new slogan made its appearance, "Keeping the Negro in his place"². Racist whites would never accept to relinquish their spirit of superiority. George Corley Wallace³, governor of Alabama from 1963 till 1987 asserted, "and I say segregation today...segregation tomorrow...segregation forever"⁴.

Hence, blacks' life in Selma was compulsorily besieged by segregation alongside lynching. Marrie S. Foster, Civil Rights activist and member of the DCVL, advocated this view when she stated that "[she] grew up in Selma and was exposed to the harsh realities of life in a community fashioned by people who hid behind the smoke screen of race superiority"⁵. Segregationists represented their stubborn bigotry and racial attitudes by enacting the Jim Crow laws. Thus, Selma's blacks were set apart as second-class citizens who could not eschew from being the 'Other'⁶ in a country that they have considered as theirs. Moreover, more than two-third of them lived under

¹ Helen L. Bevel, *Selma: The Spiritual Significance of the Right-to-Vote Movement, Demonstrated by Reverend James L. Bevel* (North Carolina: Lulu Press Inc. 2016), 20.

² Cited in Peter I. Rose, *Slavery and Its Aftermath* (New Jersey : Transaction Publishers, 1970), 375.

³ George Corley Wallace (1919 -1998) won the governorship of Alabama in 1962. He was known for his determined racial stances. When the Court that desegregation in schools became obligatory, he pledged to encumber blacks from entering schools or universities. He worked in the field of politics until he retired in 1987. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/George-C-Wallace> (accessed May 11, 2016).

⁴ Cited in Eric M. Uslaner, *Segregation and Mistrust: Diversity, Isolation, and Social Cohesion* (England: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 69.

⁵ Cited in Wally G Vaughn , *The Selma Campaign, 1963-1965: The Decisive Battle of the Civil Rights Movement* (Alaska: Majority Press, 2006), 70.

⁶ The 'Other' is a concept used to describe certain individuals as being different and not belonging to one's group. In America, racial minorities, women, immigrants, ethnic groups, homosexuals, and the disabled have been all the time described as the 'Others'. Cited in Angela Mullin Jackson, *Racial and Cultural Otherness: The Lived Experience of Americans of Korean Descent* (Florida: Universal-Publishers, 2010), 1.

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poverty¹. They were exposed to the harsh reality of living under the whites' control. Emphasizing their situation and the presence of racism, Barbara Harris Combs, assistant professor of Sociology and Southern Studies pointed out:

Selma was a different place... No less oppressive or brutal, but so very different. For one thing...that racism in Selma was as ruthless, the segregation as complete as any I yet seen...Selma people were the most "African" blacks in the South. ...the community was poor and economically oppressed².

The majority of blacks suffered from lack of education and low paying jobs. Everything was segregated and whites had priority over blacks in every sphere. It was a situation that segregationists endeavored to maintain, and any attempt to alter it was met by beating, threatening and arrest. Adhering to these attitudes, mayor of Selma John Heinz till 1964, confirmed, "Selma does not intend to change its customs or way of life"³. Therefore, to secure blacks' dependency, segregationists disarmed them politically. Blacks' power was weakened by a repressive regime that hindered them from casting their ballot. Thus, voting became a white-only affair. Blacks could not have their opinions heard or deliberately elect their representatives. Before delving into the ways that racist whites harnessed to curtail blacks' vote, it is worth shedding light on the process of voting in Alabama.

3. Process of Voting in Alabama (1963)

Voting in Alabama was not a process accomplished all at once; rather, it necessitated a registration procedure, permissible only for citizens who possessed the

¹ Gary May, *Bending Toward Justice: The Voting Rights Act and the Transformation of American Democracy* (New York: Basic Books, 2013), 1.

² Barbara Harris Combs, *From Selma to Montgomery: The Long March to Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 26-27.

³ Cited in Bertram Levine, *Resolving Racial Conflict: The Community Relations Service and Civil Rights, 1964-1989* (Columbia: University of Missouri, 2005), 48.

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residency of two years in the state and one year in the county¹. Fulfilling this condition, each citizen willing to vote, was supposed to go in person to register in his county office of board of registrars which was usually found in the county courthouse wherein he passed through the following process:

First Step: The members of the board filled out information about the applicants, including name, residency date and place of birth. Then the would-be voters completed a questionnaire embodying nearly twenty-one questions². As an example, “name some of the duties and obligations of citizenship”³. The applicants were obliged to answer all the questions by themselves, not bargaining for the registrars’ help because their answers were considered as test of their eligibility to vote.

Second Step: Once the prospective voters accomplished the first step, they were either asked to answer oral questions designed by the members of the board of registrars⁴, or to read, summarize and interpret sections from the Constitution of the United States of America.

Third Step: If the applicants pulled off the precedent tasks, they swore that they had correctly answered all the questions to the best of their knowledge and information, that they would defend and support both the Constitution of the United States of America and of Alabama, and that they were not and would never be members of any group or party which might adopt unlawful means to overthrow the Constitution of the United States of America and Alabama⁵.

Fourth Step: The would-be voters could accomplish the registration procedure if they were accompanied by a voucher. This latter referred to a reputable person in the

¹ C. G. Gomillion, “The Negro Voter in Alabama”, *The Journal of Negro Education*, Vol. 26, No. 3, *The Negro Voter in the South* (Summer, 1957), pp. 281-286, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2293411> (accessed May 10, 2016) 283.

² Gomillion, 283.

³ Cited in Howard Zinn, *SNCC: The New Abolitionists* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), 153.

⁴ Gomillion, 283.

⁵ Application For Registration, Questionnaire And Oaths mid- 1960s, <http://www.crmvet.org/info/litapp.pdf> (accessed May 14, 2016).

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community who was already a registered voter. The voucher accepted to swear under oath and penalty of perjury that the applicant was an honest person who met all the residence qualifications to vote¹.

Fifth Step: Three weeks later, the prospective voters received a postcard that indicated if they had failed or passed². They would be endowed with a certificate of registration signed by at least two members of the board if their applications and the voucher's testimony were accepted.

In Selma, the process of registration was not an easy task for the blacks to achieve. It was almost impossible for them to register to vote. The office of registrars opened only twice a month, on the first and third Mondays, and the registrars would arrive late, leave early, and take long lunch hours³. Thus, the office worked only a couple of hours, encumbering blacks from having other opportunities to get in to register. And the few blacks, who could meet the registrars, would be excluded by the methods that the whites harnessed to secure blacks' disenfranchisement. Whether the engendered devices were legal or not, whites' main concern was to perpetuate the status quo

4. Disenfranchisement of Blacks in Selma, Alabama (1963)

Cognizant of the importance of voting, whites engendered different methods to disenfranchise blacks and keep them out of the political life, disregarding the American Fifteenth Amendment that bestowed all citizens with the right to vote irrespective of race, color, and previous condition of servitude⁴. Therefore, though

¹ Bevel, *The Nonviolent Right To Vote Movement Almanac*, 261.

² Zinn, *SNCC: The New Abolitionists*, 153.

³ Bruce J. Dierenfield, *The Civil Rights Movement: Revised Edition* (London: Routledge, 2008), 112.

⁴ Thomas Kenneth R. and Larry M. Eig, *The Constitution of the United States of America: Analysis and Interpretation* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2014), 2221.

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blacks in Selma comprised 57% of the population, only 1% of them were able to register to vote¹.

4.1. Poll Tax

Poll tax was the primary lawful disenfranchisement method. To ensure that voting remained a white-only matter, Alabama legislated a new constitution in 1901² whose “language was motivated by a desire to discriminate against blacks on account of race”³. Sections 178 and 194 provided that the prospective voters must pay tax per year, estimated as one dollar and fifty cents, before they could register and cast their ballot⁴. For blacks, paying the tax was impossible since the majority of them lived in the grip of poverty. Unlike whites, blacks worked as maids, janitors and truck drivers⁵; they were still struggling to build their lives as free people. One black resident pinpointed the difference between their conditions and that of the whites’. He noted:

A Negro boy growing up in Selma lives a life that the other Americans cannot easily understand...He is aware of the job his mother and father have, how little they make, how much more the white folks make...one of his first ideas is: I must get out of this town⁶.

However, even if blacks could afford the needed amount to be able to register, this did not guarantee that they would pass and get the ability to vote. Once they

¹ Thomas F. Jackson, *From Civil Rights to Human Rights: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Struggle for Economic Justice* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 221.

² Throughout history, the state of Alabama witnessed the legislation of six constitutions, in 1819, 1861, 1865, 1868, 1875, and the last one in 1901. For further information about each one check this link: <http://www.legislature.state.al.us/aliswww/history/constitutions/constitutions.html> (accessed May 14, 2016)

³ William H. Stewart, *The Alabama State Constitution: A Reference Guide* (Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1994), 8.

⁴ Constitution of Alabama 1901: section 178.

http://alisondb.legislature.state.al.us/alison/CodeOfAlabama/Constitution/1901/Constitution1901_toc.htm (accessed May 15, 2016)

⁵ James Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries* (Washington: University of Washington Press, 1972), 317.

⁶ Cited in Howard Zinn, *The Zinn Reader: Writings on Disobedience and Democracy* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 1997), 77.

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entered the office to apply for registration, they came across written and oral tests that were not easy to be completed.

4.2. Literacy Tests

This method is represented in the written and oral questions that the prospective voters were supposed to answer. In fact, only 5% of blacks in Dallas County had a high school diploma and 60% did not have the opportunity to go to high school.¹ Determinedly, whites who controlled the educational and political systems attempted to sideline blacks and keep them uneducated². Thereof, the majority of blacks were illiterate and still trying to learn how to read and write. Their illiteracy handicapped them from passing these tests.

Registrars worked in a strong bias. On the one hand, in the written test, they complicated the task for blacks by bending them on answering every single question correctly. For minor errors blacks would be eliminated. Margaret Davidson affirmed, “one man was even rejected because he forgot to cross a “t” on his registration form”³. However, this treatment altered if the would-be voters were whites. Even if whites failed in answering all the questions, registrars would pass them⁴. Mrs. Marie S. Foster recalled when she applied to register. She expressed:

I received a letter in the mail stating that I would not be able to register because I missed one or more pertinent questions on the test and that I should try again. I returned to the courthouse several times and received the same type of letter in the mail. The only change was the date on the letter⁵.

¹ Bevel, *Selma: The Spiritual Significance of the Right-to-Vote Movement, Demonstrated by Reverend James L. Bevel*, 20.

² Vaughn ,65.

³ Davidson, 219.

⁴ Bevel, *The Nonviolent Right To Vote Movement Almanac*, 261.

⁵ Cited in Vaughn ,70.

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On the other hand, the oral questions were not less intricate. They were devised with the goal of hampering blacks from having any possible opportunity to pass the test. In a short period of time, blacks were required to answer uncommon, abstruse and fanciful questions. As an illustration, “How many bars are in a bar of soap?”¹ Such questions were beyond blacks’ ability; therefore, if they succeeded in answering the written questions, they failed to do so when they came across the oral section.

The literacy tests covered even the educated minority. Although some blacks could challenge the registrars by their meticulous and correct answers, they received the same result - failure. Amelia Platts Boynton Robinson, a Civil Rights activist and member of the DCVL remembered one occasion when a black teacher failed the test because he commented on the way one member of the board of registrars read a question for him².

If ever blacks could afford the needed amount of money to pay the poll tax and successfully could pass the tests, they found themselves susceptible to another unlawful hurdle that was hard to get rid of. The tenacious segregationists would not allow them to vote. They availed themselves of other techniques to keep blacks far from the polls.

4.3. Terrorism and Economic Retaliation

If the aforementioned disenfranchisement methods proved to be insufficient, segregationists would adopt other techniques. The KKK took charge of killing, beating or threatening any blacks who dared to register or help others to do so. Even if the voucher was white, he would be beset. Additionally, far from espousing

¹ Cited in Vaughn ,65.

² Juan Williams, *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years, 1954-1965*(New York: Penguin Books, 2013), 255.

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violence, additional organization was founded during the Montgomery Bus Boycott to prevent blacks in Selma from imitating their neighbors in claiming their rights and protesting. It was named as the White Citizens' Council (WCC) and was composed of businessmen, politicians, employers, landlords and clergymen whose aim was to "learn the plans for applying stern economic pressure on Negro advocates of integration"¹.

Unlike the KKK, the WCC sought to secure segregation without resorting to violence; rather, it depended on economic retaliation to intimidate blacks. Once blacks applied for registration, their names would pass to the WWC who would attack them economically through firings, evictions, foreclosures, blacklists, and business boycotts². Author Charles Payne described the WWC as an organization that contained members who "met openly and unmasked pursuing the agenda of the Klan with the demeanor of the Rotary³ Club"⁴, i.e., they pretended that they were contributing to the economic welfare while their main purpose was to maintain whites' power over blacks'. Annie Lee Cooper was among the blacks in Selma who believed in the importance of voting. Yet, she was fired from her work at a nursing home when her employer, who was member of the WWC, beheld her lining up with people at the courthouse⁵.

What propped up the work of both organizations and made the process of registering to vote more convoluted and nearly impossible were the combined efforts of the judge of the Alabama Circuit Court James Hare and the sheriff of Dallas County Jim Clark who proved to be headstrong in their determination to

¹ Patterson Toby Graham , *A Right to Read: Segregation and Civil Rights in Alabama's Public Libraries, 1900–196* (Alabama: University of Alabama Press 2002), 114.

² Bevel, *Selma: The Spiritual Significance of the Right-to-Vote Movement, Demonstrated by Reverend James L. Bevel*, 21.

³ A local club of business and professional people belonging to worldwide organization of similar clubs (Rotary International) devoted to serving the community and promoting world. <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/Rotary+Club> (accessed May 21, 2016)

⁴Cited in Michael Newton, *White Robes and Burning Crosses: A History of the Ku Klux Klan from 1866* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2014), 105.

⁵ Frye Gaillard, Jennifer Lindsay, and Jane DeNeefe, *Alabama's Civil Rights Trail: An Illustrated Guide to the Cradle of Freedom* (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 2010), 91.

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suppress blacks' suffrage. James Hare considered himself as a self-proclaimed expert on racial eugenics and his endorsement to blacks' disenfranchisement was based on the pretext that blacks could neither vote nor participate in politics because they were stupid and descendants of Ibo and Angolan slaves¹. Alternatively, Jim Clark was infamous for his brutality in dealing with blacks. On the registration days, he stood firm at the door of the courthouse, holding his nightstick to knock down or arrest anyone who defied his orders. He relied on two hundred possemen who were equipped with shotguns, pistols, hardwood clubs and ax-handles to bully black voters into obedience and intimidate the voters, if ever found². Furthermore, he resorted to backhanders and blackmail to push blacks into squealing on their neighbors³. His devotion to his bigotry was so strong that even after he retired he maintained, "Basically, I'd do the same thing today if I had to do it all over again."⁴

Although the United States Commission of Civil Rights reported on the situation in 1959 and 1961, no significant alterations have been noticed in the South⁵. Likewise two Civil Rights Acts had been passed in 1957 and 1960. The former empowered the Justice Department to fight discrimination in voting by reviewing blacks' complaints about the matter, whereas the latter permitted the establishment of federal referees to conduct the process of registering voters if the Justice Department proved the

¹ Bevel, *Selma: The Spiritual Significance of the Right-to-Vote Movement, Demonstrated by Reverend James L. Bevel*, 21.

² Bevel, *Selma: The Spiritual Significance of the Right-to-Vote Movement, Demonstrated by Reverend James L. Bevel*, 21.

³ Bevel, *Selma: The Spiritual Significance of the Right-to-Vote Movement, Demonstrated by Reverend James L. Bevel*, 21.

⁴ Margalit Fox, "Jim Clark, Sheriff Who Enforced Segregation, Dies at 84", *New York Times*, June 7, 2007, http://www.nytimes.com/2007/06/07/us/07clark.html?_r=0 (accessed May 21, 2016)

⁵ On September 9, 1957 Congress created the Commission on Civil Rights after receiving a certain number of complaints about the unfair treatment that some American citizens were subject to because of their color, creed, race or national origin. The Commission was an independent agency within the executive branch. It was concerned with reporting the situation and gathering facts about whether every American citizen was allowed to exercise his civil rights or not. After a thorough inspection it could release a report, in both 1959 and 1961 that elucidated the way blacks were denied their right to vote not only in Alabama but also in most of the Southern states. In U. S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Report*, Washington D. C: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1959, 31-49 and U. S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Report: Book 1, voting.*, Washington D. C: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1961, 23-27, <https://www.law.umaryland.edu/index.html> (accessed May 23, 2016).

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credibility of the grievances¹. Notwithstanding, blacks remained politically impotent. Richie Jean Sherrod Jackson², an African American writer and a Civil Rights activist, worked as a teacher and her husband was a dentist. She revealed that though her husband had testified before the Civil Rights Commission, he could not succeed in registering to vote. She explained:

After his testimony, I lost my job as an office administrator at the Selma Housing Authority. The white power elite began to look for a way to get back at [my husband] for testifying so they looked at me. They claimed I had spoken disrespectfully to one of the authority's board members over the phone and of course the alleged phone call never happened. The head of the Housing Authority came down to my office to tell me that I was fired but wouldn't tell me which board member I was supposed to have insulted. The office manager, who was black, said he hadn't heard such a call, but if the boss said it happened, well then it happened³.

Her testimony reflected the rigid and unfair system that blacks were engulfed in. Poll tax, literacy tests, intimidation and economic retaliation kept blacks voiceless and marginalized. They were tautly besieged by this repressive regime and any bid to encroach its lines would menace their lives. Nevertheless, local activists from Selma, including Amelia Boynton and her husband Sam, joined by members of SNCC in February 1963⁴, decided to intensify DCVL's effort in order to push the racist white to live up to the American creed of equality and democracy.

¹ <http://civilrightsteaching.org/resource/dallas-county-voters-league/> (accessed May 11, 2016)

² Richie Jean Sherrod Jackson (1932- 2013) was known mainly for allowing SCLC's members to reside in her house during their presence in Selma, mainly Martin Luther King whose family and hers were very close. Later in 2011 she published her book labeled *the House by the Side of the Road: The Selma Civil Rights Movement* that is considered as a firsthand account of the activities of SCLC in Selma. <http://www.jacksonfoundationandmuseum.com/> (accessed May 23, 2016).

³ Richie Jean Sherrod Jackson, *The House by the Side of the Road: The Selma Civil Rights Movement* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2011), 24.

⁴ SNCC's presence in Selma was part of a large-scale campaign that targeted the Deep South under the slogan, "One Man, One Vote". The idea to take such a move was first introduced in SNCC by Amzie Moore (1911-1982) who stressed the importance of going beyond sit-ins movements to fighting for acquiring the right to vote in order to be able to push for other meaningful changes. Accordingly, SNCC's members acquiesced in launching the campaign in the late summer of 1961 and they opted for Macomb, Mississippi as a starting point. Since they were met by different kinds of reprisals, they expanded the movement to different parts in the South. <http://onevotesncc.org/stories/story-sncc/> (accessed May 25, 2016)

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5. Blacks' Protests and Whites' Reaction

Desegregation of buses in 1957 and the call for the passage of the Civil Rights Bill in 1963 overwhelmed blacks in Selma with hope and self-awareness. Author Leonard L. indicated, “[blacks] asserted both their identity as blacks and their identity as Americans.”¹ But since they were politically disarmed, these achievements would be deemed unavailing. Deprived of the right to vote, blacks could have no chance of claiming their rights or improving their conditions. At the significance of voting authors Baldino and Kreider pointed:

No right is more precious in a free country than that of having a voice in the election of those who make the laws under which, as good citizens, we must live. Other rights, even the most basic, are illusory if the right to vote is undermined².

Conscious of this fact, DCVL's leaders set up classes to embolden blacks to vote and to teach them how to fill the application forms and pass the literacy tests³. In February 1963, the newly-wed couple from SNCC, Bernard and Colia Lidell Lafayette, came to Selma to enhance DCVL's leaders in their cause although the region was seen as the home of the most determined segregationists who took any action that deemed necessary to retain their superiority and control over blacks. Bernard Lafayette averred:

I'd actually heard about Selma before [deciding to work there]. It was during the freedom Rides when the bus I was riding...was stopped by state police who it needed to take another route...because there was a white mob waiting in Selma and they couldn't protect us. I'm saying to myself 'Oh Lord- even the state troopers are scared of this city' But even remembering that I decide, I'm going to work in Selma...and get married. Colia who I

¹ Cited in Andrew Michael Manis, *Southern Civil Religions in Conflict: Civil Rights and the Culture Wars* (Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2002), 50.

² Thomas J. Baldino and Kyle L. Kreider, *U.S. Election Campaigns: A Documentary and Reference Guide: A Documentary and Reference Guide* (California: ABC-CLIO, 2011), 129.

³ <https://www.nps.gov/nr/twhp/wwwlps/lessons/133semo/133facts1.htm> (accessed May 24, 2016)

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married was not afraid of anything. And we married our honeymoon was going to be Selma.¹

Despite all the DCVL's efforts to have blacks cast their ballots, the results were not satisfying. Most of blacks were terrified and could not trespass the line that segregationists set for them. When Bernard and his wife joined the movement, blacks were heard grumbling, "It's not gonna come to a damn thing....Somebody'll get their brains blown out. Somebody'll lose their jobs, and they're not gonna get anybody to register anyway."² In the same vein, Bernard highlighted, "our big problem was the Negro himself who would not risk the possible loss of his job and other kinds of hardships just to vote."³ As a result, he decided that the first action to start with was to buoy blacks up by helping them to get over their fear and pessimism.

Correspondingly, with the assistance of the DCVL's leaders, both Bernard and his wife worked hard to stimulate blacks' interest in voter registration. They conducted privy meetings twice a week to educate blacks on the process of completing the applications form and answering the expected oral questions⁴. Furthermore, in order to establish a strong band of energetic and brave youth that would be on their beck and call, Bernard's wife and Mari Foster met with high school and college students and persuaded them into participating in the drive against disenfranchisement⁵. The recruitment of students was based on the belief that their contribution would trigger their parents to join the movement⁶.

¹ Cited in Bevel, *Selma: The Spiritual Significance of the Right-to-Vote Movement, Demonstrated by Reverend James L. Bevel*, 22.

² Cited in Wayne Greenhaw, *Fighting the Devil in Dixie: How Civil Rights Activists Took on the Ku Klux Klan in Alabama* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2011), 166-167.

³ May, 15.

⁴ May, 15.

⁵ Greenhaw, 169.

⁶ May, 15.

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By June 1963, it became palpable that their efforts could bring a difference. Blacks' attempt to reach the ballot box increased and so did the segregationists' reaction¹. Bernard's address was published in the *Selma Times Journal* on April, 1963 so racist whites would easily catch him. On June 12, 1963, he was severely beaten with a butt of gun². By August 1963, he and his wife left Selma to be replaced by other SNCC's members, Prathia Hall and Worth Long. The latter proceeded with the previous efforts by organizing demonstrations and sit-ins movements, but still blacks could not vote. On September 15, 1963 news spread about the bomb that was dropped on the Birmingham's Sixteenth Street Baptist Church and killed three-fourteen-year old girls³. Words about the attack hit blacks like a thunderbolt. DCVL's leaders and SNCC's members made a consensus decision to devote the seventh of October for a determined demonstration in front of the courthouse.

Due to Bernard's prior work in Selma, blacks were easily mobilized. On October 7, 1963 they gathered in front of the courthouse with DCVL's leaders and SNCC's members. The American historian Howard Zinn participated in the event and in his book *the New Abolitionists* that was published in 1964 he depicted the occurrence minutely. According to him the demonstration started at 9:00 and ended at 4:30 during which about 350 blacks endured the heat of the day, hunger, thirst, and Jim Clark's insults, arrests and intimidation⁴. Though, activists could for the first time push blacks in Selma to bravely defy the white-only system, results after the day were not promising. Segregationists' reaction came fast. Mr. Dunn, a white segregationist, used to employ about sixty blacks in his rest home for aged. When he received names of two blacks who took part in the demonstration, he fired one and struck the other⁵.

¹ May, 19.

² Cynthia Griggs Fleming, *In the Shadow of Selma: The Continuing Struggle for Civil Rights in the Rural South* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield publishers, 2004), 149.

³ May, 25.

⁴ Zinn, *SNCC: The New Abolitionists*, 80-90

⁵ Gordon, 6.

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Moreover, the assassination of President Kennedy on November 22, 1963 added insult to injury and left blacks shocked and disappointed. As a result of SCLC's efforts in Birmingham, President Kennedy promised blacks to pass a bill that would put an end to discrimination in public accommodations, but his death would cause the promise to remain up in the air. Additionally, On December 30, 1963, Jim Clark attacked SNCC's members in the house that they were staying in. He arrested them and destroyed the house¹.

Albeit SNCC's efforts dwindled and could achieve scant success, they continued their fight. On July 2, 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson (1908-1973), who assumed presidency after the death of President Kennedy in 1963 till 1969, signed the long-awaited Civil Rights Act. Accordingly, group of students decided to test if whites in Selma complied with the new law or not. They were brutally attacked, arrested, and teargassed². Afterwards, on July 9, 1964 Judge James Hare issued an injunction that banned meetings of three or more people mainly if they were gathered with Civil Rights activists³. With the injunction SNCC did not stand a chance of succeeding in the campaign. Because DCVL's leaders perceived the situation, they appealed for SCLC's help. As this latter accepted to lead the movement, DCVL became its affiliate. Reverend Reese, Civil Rights activist and member of DCVL, indicated, "[We] formed a unification that would legitimize the presence of [SCLC] in Selma, since there was no SCLC chapter in that town."⁴ Indeed, DCVL's call for assistance was timely. SCLC's members were mulling over the idea of launching a voting campaign in the South, but they needed a place to focus on. Back in 1963 when the church of Birmingham was bombed, SCLC's members discussed the possibility of tackling the suffrage issue to empower blacks and suggested to use Birmingham as the battleground⁵. But the intense invitations that requested SCLC's aid led Martin Luther

¹ May, 36.

² Greenhaw, 170.

³ Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference*, 359.

⁴ Vaughn, 220.

⁵ Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference*, 315-317.

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King, Jr. to stall the voting campaign¹. When the subject was raised again, it synchronized with DCVL's appeal, and gave SCLC the opportunity to embark on its next drive.

6. Conclusion

To sum up the foregoing, it cannot be gainsaid that SNCC was responsible for planting the first seeds of the Selma Campaign. Blacks in Selma underwent years of unfair treatment and trepidation. Though, their inability to cast their ballot worsened their status, they did not pluck up the courage to rid themselves of the scourge of their suffering until SNCC came and bred change. Nevertheless, SNCC's main goal was not accomplished. After one year of hard work, it could not force the federal government to take an action in the favour of blacks; instead its efforts went awry because of the incessant segregationists' resistance, keeping blacks far from the ballot box. Consequently, DCVL's leaders perceived the decision of passing the torch to SCLC as the best solution. Therefore, the succeeding chapter will be singled out to investigate whether the DCVL had made the best resolution or not. In other words, it will investigate if SCLC could change the course of the movement or not.

¹ Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Martin Luther King*, 143.



Chapter Three

The Selma Campaign after the Involvement of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference

(1964-1965)

Chapter Three: The Selma Campaign after the Involvement of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (1964-1965)

1. Introduction

The Nobel Peace Prize that Martin Luther King, Jr. received on December 10, 1964 honored his insistence on not conceding his commitment to the nonviolence philosophy no matter how the racist whites might react. It symbolized the victory of the blacks' peaceful defiance of the racial regime that they were enmeshed in and were ruthlessly forced to adjust to, mainly in Birmingham where their nonviolent protests, under the leadership of SCLC, were broadcasted though they were brutally attacked by the tenacious segregationists. Additionally, this award along with the passage of the Civil Rights Act in the same year provided Martin Luther King, Jr. and his organization's members with deep hope and encouragement to carry on their mission in order to get another sturdy legislation that would shield blacks from the discriminatory system that was directed towards minimizing their power. The same optimistic spirit pervaded the local black leaders in Selma, who accordingly welcomed SCLC to their struggle.

However, it was not the case for the segregationists who refused intransigently to surrender their hegemony over blacks. Afraid of the presence of SCLC in Selma and aware of its goal and strategy, mayor of Selma Joseph Smitherman, on the one hand, decided not to endow SCLC with the opportunity of displaying whites' brutality to the nation, imitating Laurie Pritchett, the chief police in Albany, Georgia, who stymied SCLC's efforts by averting the use of violence. On the other hand, director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), John Edgar Hoover, longed for distracting the attention of SCLC as well as the blacks who were supporting it by attempting to tarnish the reputation of Martin Luther King. Hence, SCLC's goal to secure blacks' vote and to save the Selma Campaign from failure seemed to be trapped, chiefly with the SNCC's resentment towards SCLC's involvement in Selma. In this regard, the purport of this chapter is to cast light on the interference of SCLC in Selma and to explore the extent to which its presence influenced the campaign and impacted upon it.

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2. Dramatizing the Movement

SCLC welcomed DCVL's appeal for help for it considered it as a tempting opportunity worth to seize. As a matter of fact, both the Albany and the Birmingham campaigns respectively in 1961 and 1963 provided SCLC with lessons to benefit from in potential drives. The failure of the former and the success of the latter revealed the importance of focusing on a single, conspicuous goal that could not be achieved without the selection of the ideal place. Selma was described as the city where "almost every element of white resistance [was] present... in magnified form."¹ Therefore, it was for SCLC the perfect location to set in motion its campaign against blacks' disenfranchisement. The existence of hard-core racist whites, mainly Sheriff Jim Clark who became notorious for his bigotry and aggressive responses due to his inability to withstand his temper, would provide SCLC with the sought after atmosphere to implement nonviolent direct action strategies that would eventuate in bringing to the surface the issue of blacks' suffrage to the whole nation by instigating segregationists to behave violently in the presence of media. Cordy Tindell Vivian (1924-), also known as C. T. Vivian² noted:

[We] knew what we wanted to do... We wanted to raise the issue of voting to the point where we could take it outside of the Black Belt. . . We were using Selma as a way to shake Alabama . . . so that it would be no longer a Selma issue or even an Alabama issue but a national issue³.

He later added, "We're willing to be beaten for democracy."⁴ SCLC's members were mindful of the violence that might blow up in Selma, but this was the essence of

¹Cited in Craig Swanson, *The Selma Campaign: Martin Luther King Jr., Jimmie Lee Jackson, and the Defining Struggle of the Civil Rights Era* (New York: ArchwayPublishing, 2014), 27.

² Well known for his courage and candor, Vivian Cordy Tindel joined SCLC in the early 1960s and was responsible for directing SCLC's affiliates. He was a minister, educator, and community organizer. http://kingencyclopedia.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_vivian_cordy_tindell_1924/ (accessed June 7, 2016)

³ Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference*, 360.

⁴ Julian Bond, *Eyes on the prize: America's Civil Rights Movement 1954-1985, episode 06 Bridge to Freedom, 1965*, produced by Henry Hampton (originally aired 1987),0:53, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ej2BCUIdUI4> (accessed April 10, 2016).

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their strategy because nonviolence would be ineffective and less impressive without the eruption of violence and the presence of media to catch the scene on the spot. Though, SCLC's members were criticized of intentionally inciting violence and endangering the lives of blacks, they stood their ground and kept adhering to their strategy and they would not take such a step without spelling out the situation to the participants and teaching them how to respond and how to confront their opponents¹. They were willing to create a crisis that would coerce the federal government to interfere and take an immediate action by securing footages of the unfair treatment of the peaceful blacks' persistence and exposing them to the whole American nation. Andrew Young² (1932-) revealed this intention when he said:

Sheriff Clark has been beating black heads in the back of the jail for years, and we're only saying to him that if he still wants to beat heads he'll have to do it on Main Street, at noon, in front of CBS³, NBC⁴, and ABC⁵ television cameras⁶.

Vivid images of violent racists beating nonviolent blacks, if successfully televised and covered, would give lie to the established racial prejudice and bring about a cleavage within the whites' community, triggering those who believe in the rightness of SCLC's goal to react against the racial regime and back up blacks in their fights. Martin Luther King, Jr. asserted, "This is necessary since arousing the national conscience and winning allies is more difficult in the absence of facts."⁷ Certainly, not all the whites were subsumed under the same category of being segregationists. Still, not all of them advocated living in a society where the Jim Crow laws ruled all aspects

¹Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Martin Luther King*, 226-226.

² Andrew Young was a pastor and an administrator. Because of his commitment to the civil rights struggle and the nonviolence philosophy, he met Martin Luther King in 1957 and kept constant contact with him until he was summoned as the executive director of SCLC in 1964, <http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/government-politics/andrew-young-b-1932> (accessed June 7, 2016).

³ CBS stands for Columbia Broadcasting System

⁴ NBC stands for National Broadcasting Company

⁵ ABC stands for American Broadcasting Company

⁶ Cited in Wayne A. Santoro, "The Civil Rights Movement and the Right to Vote: Black Protest, Segregationist Violence and the Audience", *Social Forces*, Vol. 86, No. 4 (Jun., 2008), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2043081> (accessed June 4, 2016).

⁷ Cited in Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference*, 359.

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of life. Within the same community, there were whites who denied the racial injustice that blacks were daily facing and believed that blacks had the right to be full American citizens. However, they preferred to steer clear of any possible racist segregationists' backlash and not to support blacks openly. Richie Jean Jackson averred: "We knew there was some silent support for us among whites; money would be sent to us with no note, and no return address. A few would tell us, "If I was in your place, I'd be out there ...also."¹

Selma, therefore, became SCLC's target to provoke both the release of the racists' latent violence and the allies' hidden desire to help for the sake of dramatizing the movement and duplicating the Birmingham's success. Martin Luther King, Jr. insisted, "Just as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was written in Birmingham, we hope that the new federal voting legislation will be written here in Selma."² His ardor to pursue the struggle increased when he won the Nobel Peace Prize on December 10, 1964 in Oslo, Norway, and when he delivered his speech at the ceremony, he did not hesitate to accentuate the momentousness and power of promoting peace and depending on nonviolence to catalyze significant social changes³. Considering the prize as an honor to the Civil Rights Movement and SCLC's work, Martin Luther King, Jr. decided to invest the amount of money that he received with the award in the new campaign in Selma⁴.

Eager to embark on the drive against disenfranchisement, he met President Johnson when he returned from Norway on December 18, 1964 to thrash out the issue of blacks' suffrage before taking any steps in Selma. He emphasized the importance of pushing through a vehement federal legislation to curb segregationists' incessant attempts at thwarting blacks in voting. President Johnson, indeed, assured that he was mulling over the idea, but he preferred to postpone it for he was planning to settle the

¹ Jackson, 24.

² Thomas R. Wagy, "Governor Leroy Collins of Florida and the Selma Crisis of 1965", *The Florida Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 57, No. 4 (Apr., 1979), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30151004> (accessed June 7, 2016).

³ Martin Luther King, *Martin Luther King's Acceptance Speech, on the occasion of the award of the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo, December 10, 1964* https://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1964/king-acceptance_en.html (accessed June 7, 2016)

⁴ Bonnie Bader, *Who Was Martin Luther King, Jr.?* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 2007), 68.

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problem of poverty.¹ For SCLC, hence, this was a promising beginning; however, still half of the battle anchored in putting pressure on the government to expedite the procedure. To ensure this result, Martin Luther King, Jr. kept emphasizing the necessity of the interference of media in order to expand the circle of proponents. He stated, “The black man would force his oppressor to commit his brutality openly - in the light of day - with the rest of the world looking on.”²

However, still SCLC had to beat off certain obstacles. On the one hand, while Johnson endeavoured to maintain a respectful relationship with Martin Luther King, Jr. and his organization to keep track on the movement, J. Edgar Hoover, the director of the FBI was loath to do so. Instead of having the attention of media centralized on the conflict in Selma, J. Edgar Hoover craved having it focused on the aim of tarnishing Martin Luther King’s reputation in order to weaken SCLC’s power and obstruct its effort, chiefly with the momentum gathered after the Nobel Peace Prize and the passage of the Civil Rights Act³. The hostility between the two men arose when Martin Luther King, in an interview with the *New York Times* Newspaper in the summer of 1964 claimed that the agents of the FBI were white Southerners, who tried to maintain their status by developing a friendly relationship with the local police and people who were promoting segregation⁴. Hoover responded by calling Martin Luther King, Jr. as “the most notorious liar in the country”⁵, and doubting his goal by accusing the Civil Rights Movement in general of being a Communist⁶ movement rather than being a crusade against racism although his investigation proved the

¹ Michael Waldman, *The Fight to Vote* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2016), 146.

² Cited in James A. Colaiaco, “Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Paradox of Nonviolent Direct Action”, *Phylon* (1960-), Vol. 47, No. 1 (1st Qtr., 1986), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/274691> (accessed June 8, 2016)

³ Jakoubek, 92.

⁴ Cited in Ray Wannall, *The Real J. Edgar Hoover: For the Record* (Kentucky: Turner Publishing Company, 2000), 99.

⁵ Cited in Wannall, 99

⁶ After the end of the Second World War in 1945, the United States of America and the Soviet Union emerged as the most noticeable superpowers. Each one tried to expand its political and economic power and dominate the world. The rivalry between them became known as the Cold War since no weapons were used, and ended in the late of 1991 with the collapse of the Soviet Union. As far as the Civil Rights movement is concerned, Americans like J. Edgar Hoover were afraid that the Soviet Union would exploit the racial clashes in America and spread its Communist ideology. This latter refers to a way of organizing a society in which there is no privately owned property or profit-based economy, but public ownership and a communal control of the means of production. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Cold-War> (accessed June 8, 2016) and Jakoubek, 87.

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reverse¹. Moreover, when Martin Luther King, Jr. returned from Oslo, he was surprised by a package without a return address, containing recorded reel tapes and an anonymous threatening letter dispatched to both his house and SCLC's office in Atlanta. Part of the letter read as follows:

I will not dignify your name with either a Mr. or a Reverend or a Dr ... You know you are a complete fraud ... You are no clergyman ... you are a colossal fraud and an evil, vicious... your end is approaching ... [you are a] dissolute, abnormal moral imbecile...You are done. Your "honorary" degrees, your Nobel Prize...will not save you ...You are finished...the church organizations that have been helping-Protestant, Catholic and Jews will know you for what you are an evil, abnormal beast. So will others who have backed you. You are done ...There is but one way out for you. You better take it before your filthy, abnormal fraudulent self is bared to the nation².

Albeit, the content of the letter was an open intimidation, it alluded to the danger segregationists scented because of SCLC's efforts against segregation. It was an implicit signal that SCLC was on the right track. But even more surprising were the tapes that Martin Luther King, Jr. was compelled to listen to with his wife. They uncovered his private philandering affairs that FBI got as a result of the surveillance tactics it employed to keep a constant eye on SCLC's leader. "They are out to break me...to get me, harass me, break my spirit,"³ Martin Luther King, Jr. thought. Years later, on November 1, 1975 Bull Sullivan, who was Hoover's deputy, stressed this point when he confessed that FBI was responsible for sending the letter and the tapes as part of its vendetta against Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement, and he admitted that the tapes were meant to reach Martin's wife in order to inflict separation upon their marriage and breed scandal to diminish Martin's stature and push him to resign from SCLC.⁴ Nevertheless, Hoover's intensified effort did not succeed

¹ William W. Keller, *The Liberals and J. Edgar Hoover: Rise and Fall of a Domestic Intelligence State* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2014), 103-104.

² Cited in Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference*, 373.

³ Cited in Jonathan Rieder, *The Word of the Lord Is Upon Me: the righteous performance of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2008), 77.

⁴ Wannall, 104.

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in turning his aim into a perceptible reality. Martin Luther King, Jr. refused to engage in public debate with him¹ and decided to proceed with the campaign, fixing January 2, 1965 as the starting date.

However, on the other hand, another more menacing stumbling block was looming, adding tension to the situation. It was the resentful welcome of SNCC's staff members who considered themselves as the prime movers of the campaign and were responsible for banging away to mobilize blacks and build an organizational foundation in Selma. Despite sharing the same goal with SCLC, SNCC disagreed about its modus operandi and the total reliance on Martin Luther King, Jr. as being the foremost magnet for the presence of media. James Forman complained, "We [emphasized]... the necessity to build a broad based movement and not just a charismatic leader."² SCLC differed from SNCC in the fact that the former's final decisions rested upon its leader whereas SNCC preferred to work democratically where no one assumed full responsibility or was regarded as the main central figure. Furthermore, while SNCC tended towards empowering and mobilizing blacks to organize and form everlasting self-dependent grassroots community led by those at the bottom of society³, SCLC favoured working towards obtaining a vigorous legislation with perpetual effect by encouraging blacks to confront and brave their opponents until they could create a dramatic crisis.

In spite of these differences, both organizations convened in Amelia Boynton's house by the end of December 1964 to placate the tension. Under protest, SNCC acceded to the joint action and gave its assent to the leadership of Martin Luther King, Jr. who fostered both organizations to work collaboratively in Selma and put their dissensions apart in order not to be veered away from the basic goal of the campaign.⁴ Subsequently, SCLC's primal action was to defy the James Hare's injunction and to

¹ Wannall, 106.

² Julian Bond, *Eyes on the prize: America's Civil Rights Movement 1954-1985, episode 06 Bridge to Freedom*, 1965, 03:54.

³ Charles, 218.

⁴ Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference*, 372.

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implement the jail-ins strategy with the aim of drawing the attention of media as soon as possible. On January 2, 1965 the first SCLC's mass meeting was held at the Brown Chapel Church. Martin Luther King, Jr. depended on his oratory skills to electrify the seven-hundred¹ people who attended the meeting and galvanize them to take part in the movement. As SCLC's strategy hinged upon a brave direct action, Martin reiterated the incentives for working on this campaign and highlighted the likely actions so all the participants would be attuned to the possible fallouts and get ready to defend their basic civil rights. He declared:

Today marks the beginning of a determined, organized mobilized campaign, to get the right to vote everywhere in Alabama...if we are refused, we will appeal to Governor Wallace. If he refuses to listen, we will appeal to the legislature. If they don't listen, we will appeal to the conscience of the Congress...We must be ready to march. We must be ready to go to jail by the thousands...Our cry to the state of Alabama is a simple one. Give us the ballot!²

Surprisingly, racist whites did not meddle in the meeting. So, media could not serve SCLC's purpose since no shred of violence was noticed. In fact, while SCLC was assiduous in organizing its drive, segregationists were working behind the scene to hobble its progress. Joseph T. Smitherman, mayor of Selma, believed that "SCLC picked Selma just like a movie producer would pick a set."³ In other words, he perceived SCLC's tactics and knew that Selma was not chosen randomly. As a response, he appointed Wilson Baker to be the new Selma Public Safety director with the hope of controlling the police force and convincing Jim Clark not to jail the demonstrators or resort to violence to repress them⁴.

¹ Rev. Suzanne M. Marsh, *Bloody Sunday Today: The Challenge of Selma* (California: Unitarian Universalist Church of the Desert, 2015), 1, <http://uucod.org/PostAttachment/Display?postAttachmentId=11067> (accessed June 8, 2016).

² Cited in Randall B. Woods, *LBJ: Architect of American Ambition* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2006), 578.

³ Cited in Williams Yohuru, *Rethinking the Black Freedom Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 43

⁴ Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Martin Luther King*, 229.

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The first bid, thereby, failed to stir up segregationists' violence, so did the second on January 18, 1965. On that day citizens were supposed to register to vote. Martin Luther King, Jr. along with John Lewis¹ took the helm of conducting the first direct action by leading four hundred black people from the Brown Chapel Church to the courthouse². They hoped that Jim Clark would lose his temper, but unfortunate for them he did not. Joseph T. Smitherman and Wilson Baker could successfully keep him under control. Instead of being mistreated, incarcerated or violently dispersed, blacks were peacefully asked to wait in the alley until they could enter and register. This was a victory for the segregationists yet a disappointing reaction for SCLC's staff members who were persuaded that Jim Clark was masking his real character, and accordingly they made up their minds to expand the demonstrations to the neighbouring counties if the same scene recurred and Jim Clark kept disguising his accustomed attitudes towards blacks³.

However, during the ensuing days, on the nineteenth and twentieth of January, the tide turned in the favour of SCLC when Jim Clark was incensed by blacks' determined refusal to comply with his orders. Eventually, he arrested about 210 demonstrators⁴. Amelia Boynton was among those who have been brutally dragged to jail. Since she was a known activist in the DCVL, media, ultimately, could capture an event in the interest of SCLC's cause. On January 20, 1965, *The New York Times* reported, "Sheriff grabbed [Amelia Boynton] by the back of her collar and pushed her roughly for half a block into a patrol car."⁵ Consequently, the efforts of Joseph T. Smitherman and Wilson Baker to control Jim Clark dwindled and harbingers of potential violence loomed large.

¹ John Robert Lewis (1940-) was an active Civil Rights leader and chairmanship of SNCC. He participated in the civil rights movement despite his parents' refusal to do so. In 1961, he took part in the sit-ins movement and the Freedom Rides that was launched to test desegregation in interstate buses. Besides he led SNCC's efforts to register blacks in Mississippi in 1964, and accepted to work under the leadership of Martin King for he admired his strategy. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/John-Lewis-American-civil-rights-leader-and-politician> (accessed June 8, 2016).

² Jakoubek, 60.

³ Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference*, 379.

⁴ Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Martin Luther King*, 231.

⁵ Cited in John Lewis and Michael D'Orso, *Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998), 321.

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But this was only the beginning since no noticeable action was taken from the part of the federal government. On January 20, 1965 President Johnson gave his second inaugural address. In spite of the fact that the possibility of addressing the issue of blacks' disenfranchisement was not referred to in his speech, the necessity of being just and abstaining from racism was hinted at. He pointed out, "Justice requires us to remember: when any citizen denies his fellow, saying: 'His color is not mine or his beliefs are strange and different,' in that moment he betrays America, though his forebears created this Nation."¹

The following days, hence, tension was escalated. On January 22, 1965 one hundred and twenty-two black teachers marched to the courthouse to display their indignation². The incarceration of Amelia Boynton ignited their concern to take part in the movement. For SCLC, this was a heroic victory since teachers were among the elite of the black community in the South and though their participation would imperil their jobs, they came out of their shells to buttress the movement. Again Jim Clark welcomed the marchers with his billy club and knocked them down while media was broadcasting the event³. Andrew Young's jubilation was reflected when he noted, "[This day is] the most significant thing that has happened in the racial movement since Birmingham."⁴

Then, marches to the courthouse continued until Martin Luther King, Jr. was arrested on February 1, 1965 which was an outcome that the SCLC planned for to retain the interest of media. When he refused to be bailed, newsmen wondered about his action, but he clarified by confessing that his arrest was "a deliberate attempt to

¹ Lyndon B. Johnson's Inaugural Address (*January 20, 1965*), <http://www.thisnation.com/library/inaugural/johnson.html> (accessed June 8, 2016).

² Sheyann Webb-Christburg, Rachel West Nelson, and Frank Sikora, *Selma, Lord, Selma: Girlhood Memories of the Civil Rights Days* (Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1997), 33.

³ Webb-Christburg, Nelson, and Sikora, 34.

⁴ May, 64.

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dramatize conditions in [the] city, state, and community.”¹ Though imprisoned, he kept leading the movement and instructing his colleagues on how to handle it, focusing on how to maintain the pressure on Selma². Yet, outside the jail, demonstrations waxed and waned as segregationists smelt fear out, and issued a temporary injunction accordingly, ordering registrars to ease the process of registration for blacks. In the meantime, discussions were held in the White House about whether to pass a voting bill or only a constitutional Amendment³. Eventually, President Johnson appeared in a press conference on February 4, 1965 and enunciated, even so tacitly, his endorsement to SCLC’s efforts.⁴

SCLC, therefore, stalled marches as the Johnson’s words along with the issued injunction boosted the moral of its members, but this was not sufficient for its leader who, still from jail, ordered Andrew Young to keep demonstrating. He insisted, “Don’t let Baker control our movement. We may accept the restraining order as a partial victory, but we cannot stop.”⁵ Correspondingly, on February 5, 1965 *The New York Times* printed his letter, headlined *Letter from Martin Luther King, from Selma, Alabama Jail* in which the problem of blacks’ suffrage was accentuated by indicating that the Negroes in jail outnumbered those on the voting rolls⁶. Thereby, on the same day Martin Luther King, Jr. was freed after a delegation of fifteen congressmen visited him and promised that they would pass a voting rights legislation as soon as possible⁷. President Johnson assured him of this information when they met on February 9, 1965⁸. This, in fact, was an auspicious step but for SCLC it still needed a further push.

¹ Cited in Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference*, 382.

² Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Martin Luther King*, 232.

³ Waldman, 148-149.

⁴ Nick Kotz, *Judgment Days: Lyndon Baines Johnson, Martin Luther King Jr., and the Laws That Changed America* (New York: Mariner Books, 2005), 267.

⁵ Cited in Kotz, 267.

⁶ Peter John Ling, *Martin Luther King, Jr* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 185.

⁷ Kotz, 268.

⁸ Jakoubek, 96.

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To that end marches were intensively resumed and were expanded to the neighbouring counties until a tragic event befell the black community on February 18, 1965 when SCLC conducted a nighttime march in the city of Marion in the Perry County. While trying to ward his mother off, Jimmie Lee Jackson, a twenty-six young man was cruelly shot in the stomach by a state trooper. The other marchers were excruciatingly disbanded as well. The event was meagerly reported and no vivid images were captured except for the *NBC* reporter, Richard Valeriani who was victim of the violent attack. He appeared on TV from his hospital bed¹ and later he recounted:

Somebody walked up behind me and hit me with a knife handle... drew blood, which required stitches... But before I left, a white man walked up to me and he said, "Are you hurt? Do you need a doctor?" And I was stunned, and I put my hand to the back of my head and I pulled it back and it was full of blood. And I said to him, "Yeah, I think I do, I'm bleeding." And then he thrust his face right up against mine and he said, "Well, we don't have doctors for people like you²."

Eight days later, Jimmie Lee Jackson died. Response from the part of government and FBI was not satisfying. George Wallace responded by banning nighttime marches while troopers and city officers were not claimed responsibility, instead blacks were accused of deliberately stirring a fuss and were deemed to be "professional agitators with pro-Communist affiliations."³ In the light of the status quo, SCLC held meeting on February 28, in the Zion United Methodist Church in Marion. Replete with a pang of grief and irritation, Martin Luther King, Jr. eulogized the martyr and condemned the government's reaction as well as the committed atrocity against the peaceful blacks⁴. Furthermore, he announced SCLC's decision to conduct a long march from Selma to the state capitol, Montgomery on March 7, 1965 with a view to stirring up the public opinion and exhibiting their outrage to the injustice blacks had long suffered from.

¹ Julian Bond, *Eyes on the prize: America's Civil Rights Movement 1954-1985, episode 06 Bridge to Freedom, 1965*, produced by Henry Hampton (originally aired 1987), DVD, 16:33.

² Julian Bond, *Eyes on the prize: America's Civil Rights Movement 1954-1985, episode 06 Bridge to Freedom, 1965*, produced by Henry Hampton (originally aired 1987), DVD, 16:28.

³ Swanson, 114-116.

⁴ Webb-Christburg, Nelson, and Sikora, 81.

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This decision was strongly opposed by the SNCC's staff members who risked creating a rift within even their organization for that most of them believed that SCLC would gamble the lives of many people not on the success of a march that would take fifty-four miles but on gaining fame and publicity¹. Ultimately, after discussing the ins and outs of the issue, they concurred with each other that SNCC would not take part in the march except for John Lewis who was allowed to do so but as an autonomous individual and not as one of SNCC's members.

By the same token, white officials feared the upshots of this action. George Wallace threatened that he would instruct troopers to avail themselves of whatever measures to prevent the march.² Besides, SCLC, mainly its leader, received death threats³. Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach confirmed this fact to Martin Luther King, Jr. and attempted vehemently to dissuade him from marching⁴. Even so, SCLC decided not to pull out, but its members agreed that their leader should not lead the march but should be kept informed about the progress.

Accordingly, on March 7, 1965 six hundred blacks headed by Hosea Williams (1926 – 2000)⁵ and John Lewis left the Brown Chapel Church to commence the march⁶. After passing several blocks, they reached the Edmund Pettus Bridge (See Map 02) where they came face to face with the troopers under the leadership of Governor George Wallace along with Jim Clark's possemen who were deployed there and determined to halt the march. Some of them were riding horses, wearing gas

¹ Kirk, 129.

² Ling, 196.

³ Jackson, 67.

⁴ Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Martin Luther King*, 242.

⁵ Hosea Williams was widely known for his skills as a protest organizer. He was member of the NAACP, and on 1960 he presided one of SCLC's affiliates, the Southeastern Georgia Crusade for Voters. Due to his skills, Martin Luther King asked him to join the executive board of SCLC and he did so in 1962. http://kingencyclopedia.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_williams_hosea_1926_2000/ (accessed June 11, 2016).

⁶ Julian Bond, *Eyes on the prize: America's Civil Rights Movement 1954-1985, episode 06 Bridge to Freedom, 1965*, produced by Henry Hampton (originally aired 1987), DVD, 21:00.

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masks, holding their nightsticks, and brandishing their billy clubs. Newsmen and cameramen were present to report the event. Though an overwhelming sense of danger penetrated the scene, marchers were resolved not to retreat. Major of the Alabama state troopers insisted that the march would not continue and warned the marchers to go back and disperse, but they turned down the order¹.

Subsequently, a paroxysm of anger flared up, resulting in a terrifying atmosphere that would later be considered as a salient watershed in the history of the Civil Rights Movement. Troopers and possemen found in violence recourse to push back the marchers. Underneath a thick and cloudy blanket of tear gas, blacks were harshly and robustly bludgeoned and poleaxed. It did not matter for the segregationists whether the marchers were women or even children, the only thing that concerned them was to force blacks to capitulate to their commands. Although not mature enough to participate in such a march, the eight-years-old Sheyann Webb walked bravely abreast of the elders to exhibit her denial to the status quo. Later she related her experience to journalists. She flashed back:

All I could remember was an outburst of tear gas and I saw people being beaten and I began to just try to run home as fast as I could. And as I began to run home, I saw horses behind me, and I will never forget, a Freedom Fighter picked me up, Hosea Williams, and I told him to put me down. He wasn't running fast enough. And I ran and I ran and I ran. It was like I was running for my life.²

Not all blacks could successfully run as Sheyann did. Struck with terror and amazement, marchers took different ways to escape from the hazardous situation and return to the church safely, but they got waylaid by the angry possemen on their horsebacks who chased them down wherever they went to only assault, and beat them

¹ Julian Bond, *Eyes on the prize: America's Civil Rights Movement 1954-1985, episode 06 Bridge to Freedom, 1965*, produced by Henry Hampton (originally aired 1987), DVD, 22:40.

² Cited in Mary C. Turck, *Freedom Song: Young Voices and the Struggle for Civil Rights* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2009), 84.

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bitterly, causing seventeen blacks to be urgently hospitalized and nearly sixty-seven others to be treated for injuries¹. Under the blurring scene, assistance could reach them with difficulty. On this point Andrew Young commented:

We were about two blocks away from the bridge, and we went back to try to help people back. But the police were riding along on horseback beating people, and the teargas was so thick you couldn't get to where people were in need of help. And so we really had to turn the church into a hospital just to get people back to their senses. And there it was a horrible two or three hours.²

To the benefit of SCLC's cause, the cuts and thrusts of the incident were perfectly recorded, reported and broadcasted to the entire world. Exposing the villain to the whole nation, as SCLC's strategy entailed, occurred. Images of the brutal attack were soon disseminated. On the evening of the event, ABC television interrupted its program to show to the nation a fifteen-minute film depicting the peaceful blacks being severely beaten. Viewers could hear and watch Jim Clark shouting, "Get those goddamn niggers!"³ On the morrow newsmen disdained the event and dubbed the day "Bloody Sunday"⁴. The *New York Times* featured a picture that portrayed troopers and John Lewis who was on the ground as one trooper was hitting him (See Figure 01). It also published Roy Reed's article under the headline, *Alabama Police Use Gas and Clubs to Rout Negroes*, within which he recounted the incident in details.⁵

¹ Wagy, 405.

² Julian Bond, *Eyes on the prize: America's Civil Rights Movement 1954-1985, episode 06 Bridge to Freedom, 1965*, produced by Henry Hampton (originally aired 1987), DVD, 25:09.

³ Cited in Waldman, 151.

⁴ Garth E. Pauley, *LBJ's American Promise: The 1965 Voting Rights Address* (Texas: Texas A&M University Press, 2006), 67.

⁵ Roy Reed, "Alabama Police Use Gas and Clubs to Rout Negroes", *New York Times*, March 8, 1965, <http://www.nytimes.com/packages/html/books/mlk-rout.pdf> (accessed June 14, 2016)

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Figure 01: Crushing Voter Demonstration: Alabama State Troopers break up March by Protesting Negroes in Selma



Source: Unknown Photographer. *Crushing Voter Demonstration: Alabama State Troopers break up March by Protesting Negroes in Selma*. March 8, 1965. Associated Press Wirephoto. New York, <http://www.nytimes.com/packages/html/books/mlk-rout.pdf> (accessed June 14, 2016)

Likewise, the *Chicago Tribune* carried in its front page the same photo, joined by an article entitled, *Negro Routed by Tear Gas*¹. In like manner, The *Russell Daily News* and the *Washington Post* covered the event respectively under the captions, “Tear Gas, Troopers Block Rights March”² subjoined by a photo that shot the incident (See Figure 02) , and “Tear Gas, Clubs Halt 600 in Selma March”³.

¹ <http://archives.chicagotribune.com/1965/03/08/page/1/article/negroes-routed-by-tear-gas> (accessed June 14, 2016)

² <http://www.rarenewspapers.com/view/618182> (accessed June 14, 2016)

³ <http://facekobo.com/forum/topic/the-story-of-the-1965-selma-to-montgomery-marches> (accessed June 14, 2016)

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Figure 02: Police Use Tear Gas on Demonstrators



Source: Unknown Photographer. *Police Use Tear Gas on Demonstrators*. March 7, 1965. Associated Press Wirephoto. New York. <http://www.nytimes.com/packages/html/books/mlk-rout.pdf> (accessed June 14, 2016).

The Guardian, however, not only sketched out the day, but also edged its article with a caricature realized by the cartoonist Bill Papas, wherein he alluded, sarcastically, to the way troopers prevented blacks from demanding their basic civil rights (See Figure 03)

Figure 03: Bill Papas' Cartoon about Bloody Sunday



Slower, nigrab, slower

Source: Papas, Bill. *Bill Papas' Cartoon about Bloody Sunday*. March 9, 1965. <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2015/mar/09/selma-march-bloody-sunday-1965-archive#img-2> (accessed June 14, 2016).

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In a similar vein, the happening created a strong resonance on the international level. Outside America, people scorned the assault and despised United States. They considered Bloody Sunday as “a major blemish on the face of the American society”¹. On March 8, 1965, the Soviet Union media and the Vietnamese² newspaper *Trung Lap* seized the opportunity to censure the United States for the violence treatment of peaceful citizens and counted the Americans as hypocrite people who were constantly calling for democracy and liberty while denying them to blacks³. People everywhere denounced the lack of action from the part of the government.

Calls and telegrams overwhelmed the White House, calling for the intervention of the federal government⁴. SCLC convened with SNCC in the Brown Chapel Church to discuss further steps. By the end they acquiesced in the decision of Martin Luther King, Jr. who, from Atlanta, announced to conduct another march on March 9, 1965. However, this time he dispatched telegrams, calling for the assistance of all people who believed in the wrongs of Sunday events. He wrote:

In the vicious maltreatment of defenseless citizens of Selma, where old women and young children were gassed and clubbed at random, we have witnessed an eruption of the disease of racism which seeks to destroy all...It is fitting that all Americans help to bear the burden.... I call therefore...join me in Selma...in this way all America will testify that the struggle in Selma is for the survival of democracy everywhere in our land⁵.

Responses were received at lightning speed. The brutal attack shook the American conscience and swayed many people to join blacks in their fight against

¹ Cited in Pauley, 67.

² Concurrently with the Civil Rights Movement in America, the Vietnam War (1954-1975) was fought between the North and the South Vietnamese respectively under the domination and support of the Soviet Union and the United States. While the former was trying to unite both parts and establish a Communist entity, the latter engaged in the war to create an autonomous government that would be aligned to the West. Eventually the war ended by the victory of the North Vietnamese. So, of no surprise the Communist-led bloc would take Bloody Sunday on its advantage to denounce the American government. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Vietnam-War> (accessed June 10, 2016).

³ Pauley, 68.

⁴ Linda T. Wynn, "Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, March (1965)", in *Freedom Facts and Firsts: 400 years of the African American Civil Rights Experience*, ed. Jessie Carney Smith & Linda T. Wynn (Detroit: Visible Ink Press, 2009), 69.

⁵ Cited in Julian Bond, *Sing for Freedom: The Story of the Civil Rights Movement Through Its Songs* (Montgomery: NewSouth Books, 2007), 210.

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disenfranchisement. Hence, more than four hundred priests, ministers, and rabbis heeded Martin Luther King's call and agreed to take part in the second march¹. In the meantime, to eschew another more drastic scene, President Johnson tried to prevent the second march from happening or at least to procrastinate it until he could take an action. Thereby a federal injunction was issued, prohibiting the march from taking place until the court could hear testimonies about the attacks of Sunday. Therefore, whether to proceed with the second march or not remained a question under constant discussion until a compromise was reached.

2. The Partial March Compromise

Trial about Bloody Sunday was scheduled for March 11, 1965. Martin Luther King, Jr. was in a cleft stick, whether to defy the federal order or not². If he did so, he would jeopardize marchers and entrench in the mind of the nation the stereotyped images of blacks as being savage and agitators. But if he abstained from challenging the order, he would betray the trust of the people who came from long distances to be with blacks in their second march and would widen the rift between his organization and SNCC's members whose mettle to march was fervent and they feared the deferment or cancellation of the march. Furthermore, Martin Luther King, Jr. was described as a man who had "one foot firmly planted in the cotton field, the other in the White House."³In other words, he ached for preserving a respectful relationship with the federal government in order to secure the speedy passage of the Voting Rights Act. Thereupon, it was a serious dilemma that he was caught in as the final decision rested upon him. Nevertheless, after holding a lengthy discussion in the Brown Chapel Church and considering all the arguments, SCLC's leader came up with the decision of proceeding with the march on March 9, 1965. He reminded the audience about the would-be violence and the importance of retaining their stamina to achieve their aim. In his own words he stated:

¹ Wagy, 405.

² Waldman, 152.

³ Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Martin Luther King*, 6.

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We've gone too far to turn back now. We must let them know that nothing can stop us-not even death itself. We must be ready for a season of suffering. The only way we can achieve freedom is to conquer the fear of death. Man dies when he refuses to stand up for what is right, for what is just, for what is true.¹

Concurrently with the discussion in the church, President Johnson was thinking about how to encumber the impending march from taking place. Consequently, when Martin Luther King, Jr. left the Brown Chapel, President Johnson sent him Leroy Collins², the head of the Community Relations Service, to settle the matter. The argumentation between both men ended by making a covert compromise which entailed that Martin Luther King, Jr. would lead the marchers till the Edmund Pettus Bridge and then turned them around while Leroy Collins assured him that no violence would be committed and that President Johnson would do his best to accelerate the process of passing the Voting Rights Act³.

On the morning, Governor George Wallace's troopers and Clark's possemen were deployed along both sides of the bridge, waiting for the appearance of the two thousand marchers who quitted the church to set off their march⁴. Yet, this time there was not an iota of violence. Both sides stuck by the arranged agreement. On the one hand troopers remained pacific. On the other hand, when the demonstrators arrived at Edmund Pettus Bridge, they paused for a while, prayed, sung "We shall overcome" and then Martin Luther King, Jr. turned, taking them back to the church⁵.

Reactions oscillated between comfort, confusion and anger. President Johnson sighed with relief while SNCC's members, except for John Lewis, simmered with

¹ Cited in May, 100.

² President Johnson sent Leroy Collins to achieve this mission since this latter was recognized for his moderate racial standpoints. Leroy Collins confirmed, "Denying blacks equal rights was un-Christian, undemocratic, and un-realistic... We can never stop Americans from struggling to be free." Cited in Wagy, 407.

³ Wagy, 410-411.

⁴ Jessica McElrath, *The Everything Martin Luther King, Jr. Book: The Struggle, The Tragedy, The Dream* (Massachusetts: Adamsmedia, 2008), 198.

⁵ McElrath, 198.

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outrage and resentment¹. James Forman² blamed SCLC's leader and considered his action as "a classic example of trickery against the people"³, chiefly because troopers did not interfere to hamper the march as they did during the first attempt. The other marchers were muddled and did not understand what happened for they thought that their march would end in Montgomery⁴. SCLC, meanwhile, tried to appease the tension⁵.

Later that night, Rev. James J. Reeb, one of the religious leaders who answered Martin Luther King's call to assist blacks in their march, was brutally beaten by racist whites though he was not a black man. His death after two days was a robust substantiation of the terrifying and unjust situation that blacks were living in. It served the goal of SCLC's strategy that involved unmasking the oppressor to the entire world. As news spread about his death, strong indignation swept the American nation. Demonstrations took place in the northern cities, deploring the events and calling for the immediate intervention of the federal government to avoid the death of other innocent martyrs⁶.

Paying heed to the exasperated pressure, President Johnson stated that he would do his utmost to smooth the process of voting for every citizen⁷. Moreover, he appeared in a press conference on March 13, 1965 wherein he decried the adoption of

¹ McElrath, 198.

² James Forman (1928-2005) was a writer, philosopher, journalist and a Civil Rights activist. He worked as the executive secretary of SNCC from 1961 till 1966 and was condemned for his call of armed self-defense to confront whites. He participated in the Albany Movement and the Freedom Rides in 1961. He was among those who criticized the framework of SCLC. <http://biography.yourdictionary.com/james-forman> (accessed June 8, 2016).

³ Cited in Robert Cook, *Sweet Land of Liberty?: The African-American Struggle for Civil Rights in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 147.

⁴ Julian Bond, *Eyes on the prize: America's Civil Rights Movement 1954-1985, episode 06 Bridge to Freedom, 1965*, produced by Henry Hampton (originally aired 1987), DVD, 33:52.

⁵ Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Martin Luther King*, 246.

⁶ Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1981), 160.

⁷ *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1965* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1965), 272.

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violence against peaceful demonstrators and expressed his endorsement of blacks' protests for he believed that blacks were deprived of their basic civil rights and accordingly he pledged to take a prompt action.¹ On March 15, 1965, it was clear-cut that he had kept his word. On that day, audience of 70 million people watched him as he was delivering one of his most famous speeches during a session of Congress². He reproved segregationists for the unfair and ferocious treatment of blacks. Additionally, he pleaded for a potent voting rights legislation that would definitely wreck the system that fenced blacks in. He voiced:

I urge every member of both parties, Americans of all religions and of all colors, from every section of this country, to join me in that cause...There is no cause for pride in what has happened in Selma...in the long denial of equal rights of millions of Americans... Our mission is...to do justice...There is no Negro problem...There is only an American problem... This bill will strike down restrictions to voting in all elections... This time, on this issue, there must be no delay, no hesitation, and no compromise with our purpose.³

Besides, to the surprise of the audience in general and blacks in particular, President Johnson identified himself with the Civil Rights Movement when he quoted the slogan that blacks used to echo in their demonstrations. He enunciated, "Their cause must be our cause too. Because it's not just Negroes, but really it's all of us, who must overcome the crippling legacy of bigotry and injustice. And we shall overcome."⁴ For SCLC's members, Johnson's message was an evident manifestation of the effectiveness of their strategy. As they were watching TV, a great sense of ecstasy flooded over them. Richie Jean Jackson reminisced about that moment:

We were all...in front of the television... The speech began and all were quiet until a "Wow!" here or a "Well!" was cried out during the speech. As the president got near the end of his speech and spoke the words "We shall overcome," the whole house fell silent

¹ *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1965*, 274-275.

² Bernard N. Grofman and Chandler Davidson, *Controversies in Minority Voting: The Voting Rights Act in Perspective* (Washington D.C: Brookings Institution Press, 1992), 16.

³ *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1965*, 281-283.

⁴ *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1965*, 284.

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in disbelief. I turned and looked up at Martin and saw a tear sliding down his cheek. The moment was almost too much for him to handle. What could you say to this man at such a moment? Did I really hear what I thought I heard the president say? Is Martin really crying?¹

Even more, SCLC's members were pumped up when the federal court, on March 17, 1965, after hearing testimonies, ruled that the march from Selma to Montgomery would be allowed under the protection of the National Guard troops and the FBI agents. The previous arranged compromise proved its efficacy when both sides adhered to the agreement. In fact, SCLC's decision to halt the second march prevented the recurrence of Bloody Sunday. Besides, it guaranteed a more successful march and increased the number of supporters.

3. The March from Selma to Montgomery

Consumed with hope and elation, SCLC bashed away with the preparation for the third march and scheduled it for March 21, 1965². President Johnson, on his part, was hell-bent on insulating demonstrators from possible attacks. Thereby, he dispatched two thousand National Guard troops to be present during the march³. FBI agents, army helicopters, and U.S. marshals also arrived⁴. News about the march spread like wildfire, absorbing more boosters who continued to pour in⁵. Consequently, over three thousand marchers, led by Martin Luther King, left the Brown Chapel Church in Selma to start the fifty-four journey to Montgomery; however, according to the federal order only three hundred marchers were allowed to march when the highway narrowed to two lanes⁶. Complying with the order, they walked between seven to seventeen miles per day, spending their nights in the supporters' yards⁷. Along their way they

¹ Jackson, 71.

² Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference*, 410.

³ http://kingencyclopedia.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/chronologyentry/1965_03_20.1.html(accessed June 15, 2016).

⁴ Roger Bruns, *Martin Luther King, Jr: A Biography* (Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2006), 115.

⁵ Jackson, 73.

⁶ Bruns, 115.

⁷ http://kingencyclopedia.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/chronologyentry/1965_03_20.1.html(accessed June 15, 2016).

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met racist whites who were bound hand and foot and could do nothing except shouting insults to the marchers¹. Interviewed by the newsmen who were present to report the event, one of the supporters claimed that the march gave him an opportunity to recognize, for the first time, the status of blacks in the South because as he was walking he kept receiving affronted expressions.²

Even so, the demonstrators reached their destination on March 25, 1965 (See Map 02 that displays the route that blacks followed to reach Montgomery) When they arrived in Montgomery, their number increased to twenty five thousands marchers³. Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered one of his indelible speeches. He reminisced about the events of Sunday, and insisted that though their feet were tired but their soul were rested⁴. Moreover, He likened the march to a pilgrimage and expressed his great joy that different people from every faith and race came to join blacks in their march. He concluded his speech by envisioning an equal society. In a firm tone of voice, he vocalized his hope:

I know you are asking today, "How long will it take?" ... "How long will prejudice blind the visions of men..." "When will wounded justice, lying prostrate on the streets of Selma and Birmingham and communities all over the South, be lifted from this dust of shame to reign supreme among the children of men?" ... I come to say to you ... however difficult the moment... however frustrating the hour, it will not be long... because "truth crushed to earth will rise again." ... How long? Not long... because "no lie can live forever." ... because "you shall reap what you sow." ... because the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice⁵.

¹ Jakoubek, 102.

² Julian Bond, *Eyes on the prize: America's Civil Rights Movement 1954-1985, episode 06 Bridge to Freedom, 1965*, produced by Henry Hampton (originally aired 1987), DVD, 48:57.

³ http://kingencyclopedia.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/chronologyentry/1965_03_20.1.html (accessed June 15, 2016).

⁴ http://kingencyclopedia.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/documentsentry/doc_address_at_the_conclusion_of_selma_march/ (accessed June 15, 2016).

⁵ http://kingencyclopedia.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/documentsentry/doc_address_at_the_conclusion_of_selma_march/ (accessed June 15, 2016).

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Map 02: The Byway of the March from Selma to Montgomery (1965)



Source: <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/byways/byways/2050/maps> (accessed June 15, 2016)

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The audience broke in a rapturous applause. John Lewis confessed that he had never noticed such a march in his life. “It was a sense of community moving there”¹, he asserted. Victory came to its climax when President Johnson signed the Voting Rights bill into law on August 6, 1965. Thus, the campaign came into its conclusive end. The new enacted law enforced the Fifteenth Amendment by providing federal protection to the black voters, and outlawing the poll tax and the various tests that were employed to disenfranchise them. (See Appendix 04) Corollary to this outcome was the rise in the number of black voters that reached 27, 385 in Alabama, Louisiana and Mississippi before the end of the month². *The New York Times* described blacks’ struggle in Selma after the passage of the Voting Rights Act, August 6, 1965 as a “dangerous competition between the forces of racism and reason”³. Additionally, it praised the effectiveness of SCLC’s strategy and the mature leadership which succeeded in handling the matter and urging the majority of Americans to take part⁴.

4. Conclusion

Overall, SCLC’s impact on the Selma campaign could be deduced from the onset of its appearance on the scene of the battle. Segregationists in Selma presaged the end of their discriminatory system that kept blacks far from the ballot box, so they tried to take the necessary precautions to prevent SCLC from attaining its goal, but they failed. Media was magnetized by the presence of SCLC and this latter took advantage of this fact to turn the campaign in Selma into a moral issue. Eventually, by adhering to the nonviolent resistance in front of the racist whites’ violence, SCLC could appeal to the nation’s conscience and jolt President Johnson into prompt action. It is worth mentioning, as well, that a great deal of the success of SCLC was due to its leader who

¹ Julian Bond, *Eyes on the prize: America’s Civil Rights Movement 1954-1985, episode 06 Bridge to Freedom, 1965*, produced by Henry Hampton (originally aired 1987), DVD, 52:13.

² Grofman and Davidson, 21.

³ Cited in Charles Lincoln Van Doren and Robert McHenry, *Webster’s Guide to American History: A Chronological, Geographical, and Biographical Survey and Compendium* (Massachusetts: Merriam Company Publishers, 1971), 596.

⁴ Van Doren and McHenry, 596.

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exerted himself to avoid violence protests and proved his skills when he accepted the arranged compromise that preceded the second march.



General Conclusion

General Conclusion

As the current research comes to its final lines, it becomes conspicuous that the SCLC's touch had great impact on the Selma campaign and the passage of the victorious Voting Rights Act in 1965. Obviously, SCLC could take advantage of its previous activism. Indeed, from its birth in 1957, SCLC had its ups and downs; while it enjoyed the ups, it took the best from the downs to mature into one of the most prominent organizations. Doubtlessly, its emergence was not an act of serendipity; rather it arose as an inevitable outcome to the hardships that blacks endured at the hand of the racist whites who were empowered by the silence of the federal government. Though it can never be denied that SCLC was not the only organization to try to challenge the tough discriminatory system, it differed from its predecessors in that its work was based on compelling the federal government to take an action that would have a perpetual effect in forcing the racists to comply with the laws that endowed blacks with equality.

In fact, by 1963, SCLC learnt that projecting blacks' suffering worldwide necessitated the adoption of the nonviolent direct action in the place that embraced violent segregationists. For instance, If Selma did not have violent personalities, including George Wallace and Jim Clark, SCLC's strategy might have failed to attain its objective, and here lies the distinction between SNCC and SCLC. Blacks in Selma underwent a severe and terrifying period that fettered them. When SNCC opted for Selma to launch its voting campaign, it expected to achieve a triumphant result, but it could not. Although it did not resort to violence, its efforts failed to grant blacks the right to vote due to the inaction of the federal government and the inability of drawing the attention of media. SNCC was inclined towards mobilizing blacks so that they could fight for themselves while SCLC insisted upon winning a strong legislation that blacks would be able to base their demands on.

By the same token, contrary to SNCC, once SCLC joined the movement, it caught the attention of both the segregationists and media who, though unintentionally, worked in tandem to turn the tide of the conflict in the favor of blacks. In fact, SCLC displayed the lessons it acquired from the activism that preceded its existence in Selma by transcending the local borders and bringing the disenfranchisement issue to the fore, so that even people outside America sympathized with the blacks' cause. But essential to the SCLC's victory was the presence of its leader, Martin Luther King, whose fame, eloquence, and the devotion to the nonviolent strategy were the prime grounds for galvanizing blacks into the peaceful protest, raising funds, worrying racists, and captivating the interest of media. He demonstrated his skill in making opportune decisions. As an illustration, on January 2, 1965 he defied the injunction that banned meetings by holding one, and the converse occurred before the second march on March 9, 1965. In effect, the first decision helped to rekindle blacks' interest in reviving the movement after it had been stagnated, whereas the second one not only saved the lives of the marchers but also bore on the speedy passage of the Voting Rights Act.

In the same vein, Martin Luther King's insistence on keeping smooth ties with the federal government and not widening the gap between him and FBI participated in a great deal in the course of the movement. The decision to turn around the second march was not easy to take but eventually it benefited both sides. On the one hand, President Lyndon B. Johnson was given the opportunity to exhibit his support to the blacks' cause and his denial to the segregationists' behaviors. Moreover, he could appear to the world as a responsible president who cared in living up to the American principles of democracy, liberty and freedom. On the other hand, blacks secured a successful march that was protected even by the FBI, and culminated in the passage of the act they longed for.

Overall, the strategies that SCLC implemented, including, peaceful marches, jail-ins, and delivering speeches, proved its efficacy in influencing the Selma Campaign in a positive way. Speeches rekindled blacks' interest to pursue their fight against segregation after they lost hope to reach the ballot box and felt depressed. Though they

were aware of the potential consequences, they kept protesting. Peaceful marches and jail-ins secured the help of media in showing to the world that blacks were not that savage people and all they were looking for was justice and to be full American citizens. In spite of the fact that the campaign resulted in the murder of two innocent martyrs, SCLC could take advantage of the situation to turn the tide towards its goal. Nevertheless, it was accused of the total dependence on Martin Luther King. This fact may open the door for conducting further research on SCLC's activism after the assassination of its leader to investigate whether SCLC could retain the momentum it gleaned or not.



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Appendices

Appendix 01: The Departments of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference

SCLC took cognizance of the significance of “[balancing] between attacking the causes and healing the effects of segregation”¹. It believed that blacks could not be fully integrated in the American society if their civic, religious, economic, and cultural conditions remained in the gutter. Consequently, by 1964 eight departments were created. They each had specific task to accomplish, yet shared the same aim, to bolster up blacks’ status. According to what was penned in the pamphlet entitled *This is SCLC*, the departments and their roles are as follows:

- **Department of voter registration:** Having been doomed to illiteracy for many years, blacks needed to understand the ballot process. Thereby, this department was designed to secure the increment of blacks’ registration to vote by elucidating all that was necessary to get the procedure better accomplished.
- **Department of Operation Breadbasket:** Its main target was to provide blacks with better jobs for decent livelihood.
- **Department of dialogue:** Having the creation of a ‘beloved community’ as a strong-willed aim, SCLC designed the department of dialogue to smooth the path of communication between black and white communities. The same endeavour would be tried within each community, either.
- **Department of direct action:** This department would try to promote the use of direct action technique on demand.

¹ Marcus D. Pohlmann, *African American Political Thought: Confrontation vs. compromise, from 1945 to the present* (U.K: Taylor & Francis, 2003), 29.

- **Department of Washington office:** The basic task of this department was to help the interpretation of each movement's worried and demands to both federal officials and black community.

- **Department of citizenship education:** Complete integration in the American society would not possible if blacks were not acquainted with both, their duties and privileges. Hence, it was the task of this department to train teachers and establish classes to teach blacks the fundamentals of writing and reading and give them an idea on what citizenship is.

- **Department of non-violent education:** Being the cornerstone of SCLC, non-violent strategy needed to be inculcated. Thus, the department of non-violent

Source: Southern Christian Leadership Conference, *This is SCLC*, 4:5.

Appendix 02: Sample of Alabama Application Form in 1963

.....
(Applicants Full Name)

1. State your name, the date and place of your birth, and your present address
2. Are you single or married? (a) If married, give name, resident and place of birth of your husband or wife, as the case may be:
3. Give the names of the places, respectively, where you have lived during the last five years; and the name or names by which you have been known during the last five years:
4. If you are self-employed, state the nature of your business:
A. If you have been employed, by another during the last five years, State the nature of your employment and the name or names of such employer or employers and his or their addresses:
5. If you claim that you are bona fide resident of the State of Alabama, give the date on which you claim to have become such bona fide resident:
(a) When did you become a bona fide resident of County: _____
(b) When did you become a bona fide resident of Ward or Precinct
6. If you intend to change your place of residence prior to the next general election, state the facts:
7. Have you previously applied for and been denied registration as a voter?
(a) If so, give the facts:
8. Has your name been previously stricken from the list of persons Registered?
9. Are you now or have you ever been a dope addict or a habitual drunkard?
(A)If you are or have been a dope addict or habitual drunkard, explain as fully as you can:
10. Have you ever been legally declared insane? _____
(a) If so, give details:
11. Give a brief statement of the extent of your education and business experience:
12. Have you ever been charged with or convicted of a felony or crime or offense involving moral turpitude? _____
(a) If so, give the facts:
13. Have you ever served in the Armed Forces of the United States Government?
(a) If so, state when and for approximately how long:
14. Have you ever been expelled or dishonorable discharged from any school or college or from any branch of the Armed Forces of the United States, or of any other Country? _____ If so, state facts:
15. Will you support and defend the Constitution of the United States and the

Constitution of the State of Alabama?

16. Are you now or have you ever been affiliated with any group or organization which advocates the overthrow of the United States Government or the government of any State of the United States by unlawful means? (a) If so, state the facts:
17. Will you bear arms for your county when called upon it to do so? If the answer is no, give reasons:
18. Do you believe in free elections and rule by the majority?
19. Will you give aid and comfort to the enemies of the United States Government or the Government of the State of Alabama?
20. Name some of the duties and obligations of citizenship:
(A) Do you regard those duties and obligations as having priority over the duties and obligations you owe to any other secular organization when they are in conflict?
21. Give the names and post office addresses of two persons who have present knowledge of your bona fide residence at the place as stated by you:

Source: <https://www.nps.gov/nr/twhp/wwwlps/lessons/133semo/questionnaireSample.pdf>
(accessed May 14, 2016)

Appendix 03: Sample of Alabama Literacy Tests in 1963

(The following questions shall be answered by the applicant without assistance.)

1. What is the chief executive of Alabama called? **Governor**
2. Are post offices operated by the state or federal government? **Federal Government**
3. What is the name of the president of the United States? **Lyndon B. Johnson**
4. To what national lawmaking body does each state send senators and representatives? **Congress**

-
1. Has the following part of the U.S.A been changed?

"Representatives shall be apportioned among the several states according to their respective numbers, counting the whole number of persons in each state, excluding Indians not taxed." **No**

2. Which of the following is one of the duties of the United States Internal Revenue Service?

Passing legislation

Collection Of Income Taxes

Giving welfare checks

3. There are three main types of city government in Alabama. Name one. **Mayor Council**

4. Law requires that "In God we trust" be placed on all money issued in the United States. **True**

5. Does the population of the state affect the amount of the individual or corporate income taxes which may be levied on its citizens? **No**

2. Who pays members of Congress for their services, their home states or the United States? **United States**

3. How many senators are elected from each state? **Two**

4. If the United States is a party in a suit can the case be heard in a federal court? **Yes.**

9. What body can try impeachments of the president of the United States? **Senate**

10. Check the applicable definition for responsibility.

A duty

A speech

A failure

11. Name the attorney general of the United States. **Nicolas Katzenbach**

12. Women may now serve on juries in Alabama State courts. **True**

13. If a person charged with treason denies his guilt, how many persons must testify against him before he can be convicted? **Two**

14. At what time of day on January 20 each of our years does the term of the

president of the United States end? 12 noon

15. If the president does not wish to sign a bill, how many days is he allowed in which to return it to Congress for reconsideration? **Ten**

16. If a bill is passed by Congress and the President refuses to sign it and does not send it back to Congress in session within the specified period of time is it the bill defeated or does it or does it become law? **It becomes law unless Congress adjourns before the expiration of 10 days.**

17. Can the president of the United States be removed from office for conviction of bribery? **Yes**

18. Check the applicable definition of treaty

Agreement between nations

Tax

Written oration

19. Name the man who is nationally known for heading the Federal Bureau of Investigation. **Hoover**

20. What officer is designed by the Constitution to be president of the Senate of the United States? **Vice President**

21. Can the state coin money with the consent of Congress? **No**

22. Name one area of authority over state militia reserved exclusively to the state.

The appointment of officers

23. The power of granting patents, that is, of securing to inventors the exclusive right to their discoveries, is given to the Congress for the purpose of **promoting progress.**

24. The only legal tender which may be authorized by states for payment of debts is **U.S currency.**

25. Can you be imprisoned, under Alabama law, for a debt? **No**

26. In addition to becoming a U.S citizen by birth, a person may become a citizen by

Immigration

Naturalization

Voting

27. Name one person by name or title who is part of the judicial branch of government in Alabama. **Chief Justice Livingston**

28. The first sentence of the United States Constitution is called the Preamble. **True**

29. In what year did the Congress gain the right to prohibit the migration of persons to the states? **1808**

30. Who is the commander-in-chief of the army and navy of the United States? **The President**

31. The president is forbidden to exercise his authority of pardon in cases of impeachment

Source: <https://www.nps.gov/nr/twhp/wwwlps/lessons/133semo/questionnaireSample.pdf> and <http://www.crmvet.org/info/litques.pdf> (accessed May 14, 2016)

Appendix 04: Sections from the Voting Rights Act 1965

Public Law 89-110
Voting Rights Act of 1965
Eighty-ninth Congress of the United States of America
AT THE FIRST SESSION

Begun and held at the City of Washington on Monday, the fourth day of January,
One thousand nine hundred and sixty-five

An Act to enforce the fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, and

for other purposes.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That this Act shall be known as the “Voting Rights Act of 1965.”

SEC. 2.

No voting qualifications or prerequisite to voting, or standard, practice, or procedure shall be imposed or applied by any State or political subdivision to deny or abridge the right of any citizen of the United States to vote on account of race or color.

SEC. 3.

Whenever the Attorney General institutes a proceeding under any statute to enforce the guarantees of the fifteenth Amendment in any State or political subdivision the court shall authorize the appointment of Federal examiners by the United States Civil Service Commission in accordance with section 6 to serve for such period of time and for such political subdivisions as the court shall determine is appropriate to enforce the guarantees of the fifteenth Amendment (1) as part of any interlocutory order if the court determines that the appointment of such examiners is necessary to enforce such guarantees or (2) as part of any final judgment if the court finds that violations of the fifteenth Amendment justifying equitable relief have occurred in such State or subdivision: *Provided,* That the court need not authorize the appointment of examiners if any incidents of denial or abridgement of the right to vote on account of race or color (1) have been few in number and have

been promptly and effectively corrected by State or local action, (2) the continuing effect of such incidents has been eliminated, and (3) there is no reasonable probability of their recurrence in the future.

SEC. 4.

(a) To assure that the right of citizens of the United States to vote is not denied or abridged on account of race or color, no citizen shall be denied the right to vote in any Federal, State, or local election because of his failure to comply with any test or device in any State with respect to which the determinations have been made under subsection.....For purposes of this section no State or political subdivision shall be

determined to have engaged in the use of tests or devices for the purpose or with the

effect of denying or abridging the right to vote on account of race or color if (1) incidents of such use have been few in number and have been promptly and effectively corrected by State or local action, (2) the continuing effect of such incidents has been eliminated, and (3) there is no reasonable probability of their recurrence in the future.

SEC. 5.

Whenever a State or political subdivision with respect to which the prohibitions set forth in section 4(a) are in effect shall enact or seek to administer any voting qualifications or prerequisite to voting, or standard, practice, or procedure with respect to voting different from that in force or effect on November 1, 1964, such State or subdivision may institute an action in the United States District Court for the District of Columbia for a declaratory judgment that such qualification, prerequisite, standard, practice, or procedure does not have the purpose and will not have the effect of denying or abridging the right to vote on account of race or color, and unless and until the court enters such judgment no person shall be denied the right to vote for failure to comply with such qualification, prerequisite, standard, practice, or procedure: *Provided*, That such qualification, prerequisite, standard, practice, or procedure may be enforced without such proceeding if the qualification, prerequisite, standard, practice, or procedure has been submitted by

the chief legal officer or the appropriated official of such State or subdivision to the Attorney General and the Attorney General has not interposed an objection within sixty days after such submission, except that neither the Attorney General's failure to object nor a declaratory judgment entered under this section shall bar a subsequent action to enjoin enforcement of such qualification, prerequisite, standard, practice, or procedure. Any action under this section shall be heard and determined by a court of three judges in accordance with the provisions of section 2284 of title 28 of the United States Code and any appeal shall lie to the Supreme Court.

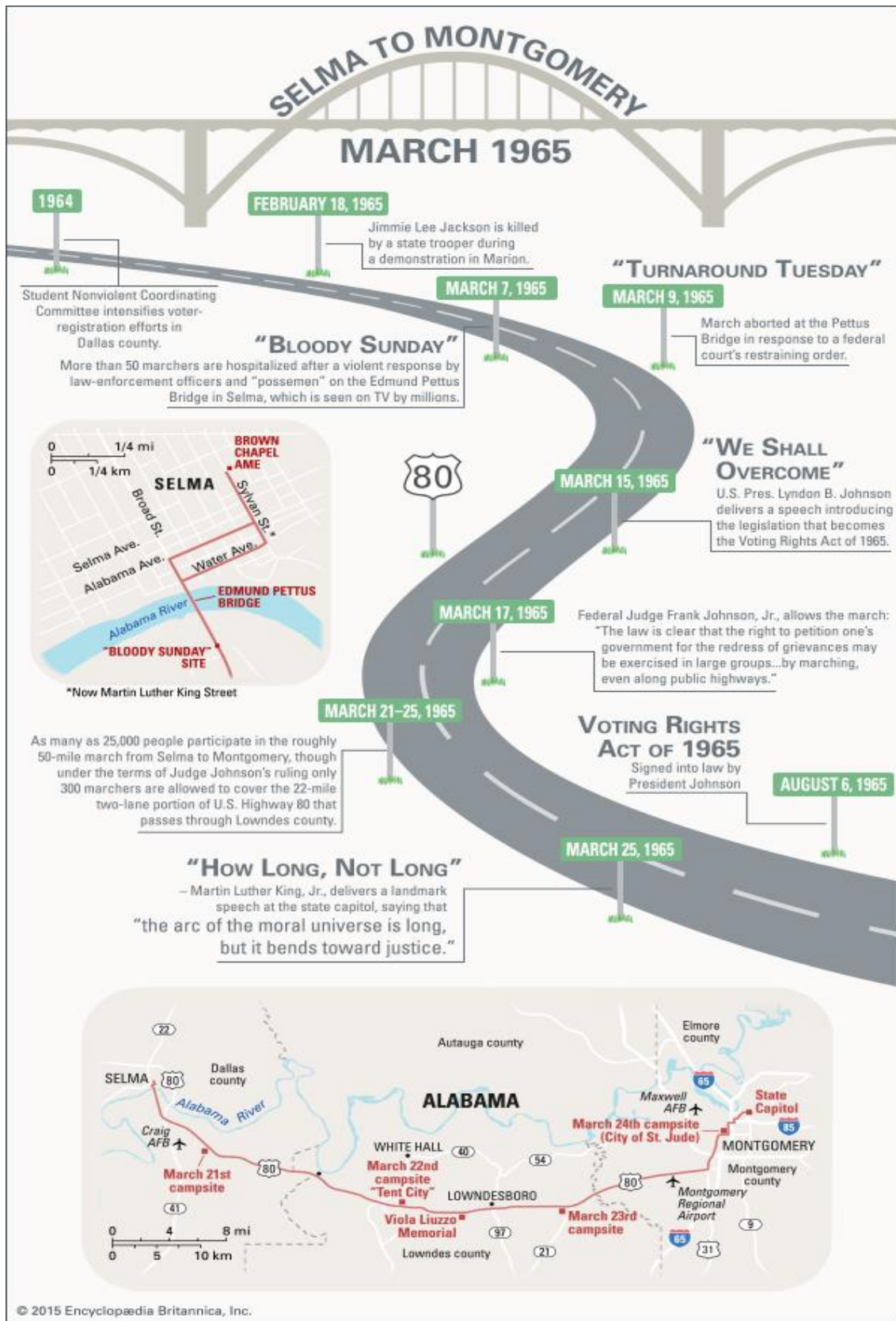
(b) If in a proceeding instituted by the Attorney General under any statute to enforce the guarantees of the fifteenth Amendment in any State or political subdivision the court finds that a test or device has been used for the purpose or with the effect of denying or abridging the right of any citizen of the United States to vote on account of race or color, it shall suspend the use of tests and devices in such State or political subdivisions as the court shall determine is appropriate and for such period as it deems necessary.

(c) If in any proceeding instituted by the Attorney General under any statute to enforce the guarantees of the fifteenth Amendment in any State or political subdivision the court finds that violations of the fifteenth Amendment justifying equitable relief have occurred within the territory of such State or political subdivisions, the court in addition to such relief as it may grant, shall retain jurisdiction for such period as it may deem appropriate and during such period no voting qualification or prerequisite to voting, or standard, practice, or procedure with respect to voting different from that in force or effect at the time the proceeding was commenced shall be enforced unless and until the court finds that such qualifications, prerequisite, standard, practice, or procedure does not have the purpose and will not have the effect of denying or abridging the right to vote on account of race or color: *Provided*, That such qualification, prerequisite, standard, practice, or procedure has been submitted by the chief legal officer or other appropriate official of such State or subdivision to the Attorney General and the

Attorney General has not interposed an objection within sixty days after such submission, except that neither the court's findings nor the Attorney General's failure to object shall bar a subsequent action to enjoin enforcement of such qualifications, prerequisite, standard, practice, or procedure.

Source: http://library.clerk.house.gov/reference-files/PPL_VotingRightsAct_1965.pdf (accessed June 16, 2016)

Appendix 05: Figure of the Main Events of the Selma movement (1964-1965)



Source: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/John-Lewis-American-civil-rights-leader-and-politician> (accessed June 8, 2016)

Abstract

The Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) is an African American organization that was founded in 1957 under the leadership of Martin Luther King, Jr. to alter the discriminatory laws that restricted the freedom of blacks in America and kept them as second class citizens. In this regard, this research paper highlights the contribution of this organization to the passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965. A qualitative method was implemented by gleaning and analyzing the necessary data from the available historical sources, including books, articles, recorded interviews and narrations of eyewitnesses. The results show that though SCLC was not the prime mover of the campaign that started in 1963 to put an end to the phenomenon of blacks' disenfranchisement, its involvement in 1964 had a significant impact on signing the Voting Rights Act in 1965 since its presence in the campaign paved the way for the adoption of the nonviolent strategies and the interference of media that could capture images of the violent treatment of peaceful blacks during their march. As a result, the federal government was compelled to take a prompt action.

Résumé

L'organisation Afro-américaine connue sous le nom *Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (SCLC) fondée en 1957 par Martin Luther King visait à amender les lois de discrimination qui limitaient la liberté des Noirs en Amérique et ainsi les maintenaient en tant que citoyens de seconde classe. Pour cette raison, ce travail met en évidence la contribution de cette organisation à l'adoption du Loi sur le droit de vote en 1965. Cette recherche utilise une méthode qualitative en glanant et analysant les données nécessaires à partir des sources historiques disponibles, y compris des livres, des articles, des interviews et narrations des témoignages. Les résultats donc détectent que bien que le SCLC n'a pas été vraiment le moteur principal de l'opération qui a commencé en 1963 pour mettre fin à l'interdiction qui a privé les Noirs de leurs *droit de vote*, son engagement en 1964 a eu un impact significatif sur l'exécution des droits de vote en 1965 car sa présence dans l'opération a aidé à l'adoption des stratégies non-violentes et à l'ingérence de media qui pourraient capturés les images du traitement violent des noirs au cours de leur pacifique manifestation. En conséquence, le gouvernement fédéral a été obligé de prendre une action rapide.

ملخص

يعتبر مؤتمر القيادة المسيحية الجنوبية (SCLC) منظمة للأمريكيين ذوي الأصول الإفريقية، والتي تم تأسيسها عام 1957 برئاسة مارتن لوثر كينغ من أجل تغيير قوانين التمييز العنصري التي حدت من حرية السود في أمريكا وأبقتهم مواطنين من الدرجة الثانية. وفي هذا الصدد يهدف هذا البحث الي تسليط الضوء على مساهمة هذه المنظمة في سنّ قانون حق الاقتراع لعام 1965. وقد تم اتباع البحث النوعي وذلك من خلال جمع وتحليل البيانات اللازمة من المصادر التاريخية المتاحة من كتب، مقالات، مقابلات و روايات شهود عيان مسجلة. وتكشف النتائج أنه بالرغم من أن مؤتمر القيادة المسيحية الجنوبية لم يكن المحرك الرئيسي للحملة التي بدأت سنة 1963 من أجل وضع حد لظاهرة حرمان السود من حقهم في الاقتراع إلا أن انضمامه الي هذه الحملة سنة 1964 كان له تأثيرا كبيرا على توقيع قانون حق الاقتراع لعام 1965، وذلك لأن تواجده في الحملة مهد الطريق للاعتماد على الاستراتيجيات السلمية التي أدت الي تدخل الإعلام الذي نجح في التقاط صور العنف الذي تعرض له السود خلال مسيرتهم السلمية ، فكانت النتيجة أن أُجبرَت الحكومة الفدرالية على اتخاذ اجراء فوري.