

Selma

Alabama Voter Registration Form, c. 1964-1965

This voter registration application was collected by the Honorable Rufus A. Lewis and is part of his collection at the Trenholm State Technical College Archives in Montgomery, Alabama. Lewis, a World War II veteran and longtime activist, set up citizenship schools for Montgomery's black population to help them register to vote. He also became a leader in his city's [bus boycott](#) in 1955-56.

Alabama changed the registration system four times in 1964-1965 in order to keep blacks from registering to vote. There were as many as 100 versions of the test in circulation at one time, making it impossible to study for it.

QUESTIONNAIRE

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 a 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 dishonorably 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 country 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:

Insert Part III (5)

(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

Instructions "A"

The applicant will complete the remainder of this questionnaire before a Board member and at his instructions. The Board member shall have the applicant read any one or more of the following excerpts from the U. S. Constitution using a duplicate form of this Insert Part III. The Board member shall keep in

his possession the application with its inserted Part III and shall mark thereon the words missed in reading by the applicant.

EXCERPTS FROM THE CONSTITUTION

1. "The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause supported by oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the person or things to be seized."
2. "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."
3. "Treason against the United States, shall consist only in levying war against them, or in adhering to their enemies, giving them aid and comfort."
4. "The senators and representatives before mentioned, and the members of the several legislatures, and all executive and judicial officers, both of the United States and of the several states, shall be bound by oath or affirmation, to support this constitution."

INSTRUCTIONS "B"

The Board member shall then have the applicant write several words, or more if necessary to make a judicial determination of his ability to write. The writing shall be placed below so that it becomes a part of the application. If the writing is illegible, the Board member shall write in parentheses beneath the writing the words the applicant was asked to write.

HAVE APPLICANT WRITE HERE, DICTATING WORDS FROM THE CONSTITUTION

Signature of Applicant _____

Source: Hon. Rufus A. Lewis Collection, Archives, H. Council Trenholm State Technical College, Montgomery, Alabama. <http://www.alabamamoments.state.al.us/sec59ps.html>

http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/eyesonthep prize/sources/ps_march.html

“And We Shall Overcome”: President Lyndon B. Johnson’s Special Message to Congress

Although the 15th Amendment, ratified in 1870, guaranteed citizens the right to vote regardless of race, by 1957 only 20 percent of eligible African Americans voted, due in part to intimidation and discriminatory state requirements such as poll taxes and literacy tests. Despite the passage of the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964, which outlawed discrimination in employment and public accommodations based on race, religion, national origin, or sex, efforts to register African Americans as voters in the South were stymied. In 1965, following the murder of a voting rights activist by an Alabama sheriff’s deputy and the subsequent attack by state troopers on a massive protest march in Selma, Alabama, President Lyndon B. Johnson pressed Congress in the following speech to pass a voting rights bill with teeth. As Majority Leader of the Senate, Johnson had helped weaken the 1957 Civil Rights Act. When he assumed the presidency following the assassination of John F. Kennedy in November 1963, however, Johnson called on Americans “to eliminate from this nation every trace of discrimination and oppression that is based upon race or color,” and in the following speech adopted the “We Shall Overcome” slogan of civil rights activists. His rhetoric and subsequent efforts broke with past presidential precedents of opposition to or lukewarm support for strong civil rights legislation. Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act of 1965 into law on August 6.

[As delivered in person before a joint session at 9:02 p.m.]

Mr. Speaker, Mr. President, Members of the Congress:

I speak tonight for the dignity of man and the destiny of democracy.

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.

At times history and fate meet at a single time in a single place to shape a turning point in man’s unending search for freedom. So it was at Lexington and Concord. So it was a century ago at Appomattox. So it was last week in Selma, Alabama.

There, long-suffering men and women peacefully protested the denial of their rights as Americans. Many were brutally assaulted. One good man, a man of God, was killed.

There is no cause for pride in what has happened in Selma. There is no cause for self-satisfaction in the long denial of equal rights of millions of Americans. But there is cause for hope and for faith in our democracy in what is happening here tonight.

For the cries of pain and the hymns and protests of oppressed people have summoned into convocation all the majesty of this great Government—the Government of the greatest Nation on earth.

Our mission is at once the oldest and the most basic of this country: to right wrong, to do justice, to serve man.

In our time we have come to live with moments of great crisis. Our lives have been marked with debate about great issues; issues of war and peace, issues of prosperity and depression. But rarely in any time does an issue lay bare the secret heart of America itself. Rarely are we met with a challenge, not to our growth or abundance, our welfare or our security, but rather to the values and the purposes and the meaning of our beloved Nation.

The issue of equal rights for American Negroes is such an issue. And should we defeat every enemy, should we double our wealth and conquer the stars, and still be unequal to this issue, then we will have failed as a people and as a nation.

For with a country as with a person, "What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

There is no Negro problem. There is no Southern problem. There is no Northern problem. There is only an American problem. And we are met here tonight as Americans—not as Democrats or Republicans—we are met here as Americans to solve that problem.

This was the first nation in the history of the world to be founded with a purpose. The great phrases of that purpose still sound in every American heart, North and South: "All men are created equal"—"government by consent of the governed"—"give me liberty or give me death." Well, those are not just clever words, or those are not just empty theories. In their name Americans have fought and died for two centuries, and tonight around the world they stand there as guardians of our liberty, risking their lives.

Those words are a promise to every citizen that he shall share in the dignity of man. This dignity cannot be found in a man's possessions; it cannot be found in his power, or in his position. It really rests on his right to be treated as a man equal in opportunity to all others. It says that he shall share in freedom, he shall choose his leaders, educate his children, and provide for his family according to his ability and his merits as a human being.

To apply any other test—to deny a man his hopes because of his color or race, his religion or the place of his birth—is not only to do injustice, it is to deny America and to dishonor the dead who gave their lives for American freedom.

THE RIGHT TO VOTE

Our fathers believed that if this noble view of the rights of man was to flourish, it must be rooted in democracy. The most basic right of all was the right to choose your own leaders. The history of this country, in large measure, is the history of the expansion of that right to all of our people.

Many of the issues of civil rights are very complex and most difficult. But about this there can and should be no argument. Every American citizen must have an equal right to vote. There is no reason which can excuse the denial of that right. There is no duty which weighs more heavily on us than the duty we have to ensure that right.

Yet the harsh fact is that in many places in this country men and women are kept from voting simply because they are Negroes.

Every device of which human ingenuity is capable has been used to deny this right. The Negro citizen may go to register only to be told that the day is wrong, or the hour is late, or the official in charge is absent. And if he persists, and if he manages to present himself to the registrar, he may be disqualified because he did not spell out his middle name or because he abbreviated a word on the application.

And if he manages to fill out an application he is given a test. The registrar is the sole judge of whether he passes this test. He may be asked to recite the entire Constitution, or explain the most complex provisions of State law. And even a college degree cannot be used to prove that he can read and write.

For the fact is that the only way to pass these barriers is to show a white skin.

Experience has clearly shown that the existing process of law cannot overcome systematic and ingenious discrimination. No law that we now have on the books—and I have helped to put three of them there—can ensure the right to vote when local officials are determined to deny it.

In such a case our duty must be clear to all of us. The Constitution says that no person shall be kept from voting because of his race or his color. We have all sworn an oath before God to support and to defend that Constitution. We must now act in obedience to that oath.

GUARANTEEING THE RIGHT TO VOTE

Wednesday I will send to Congress a law designed to eliminate illegal barriers to the right to vote.

The broad principles of that bill will be in the hands of the Democratic and Republican leaders tomorrow. After they have reviewed it, it will come here formally as a bill. I am grateful for this opportunity to come here tonight at the invitation of the leadership to reason with my friends, to give them my views, and to visit with my former colleagues.

I have had prepared a more comprehensive analysis of the legislation which I had intended to transmit to the clerk tomorrow but which I will submit to the clerks tonight. But I want to really discuss with you now briefly the main proposals of this legislation.

This bill will strike down restrictions to voting in all elections—Federal, State, and local—which have been used to deny Negroes the right to vote.

This bill will establish a simple, uniform standard which cannot be used, however ingenious the effort, to flout our Constitution.

It will provide for citizens to be registered by officials of the United States Government if the State officials refuse to register them.

It will eliminate tedious, unnecessary lawsuits which delay the right to vote.

Finally, this legislation will ensure that properly registered individuals are not prohibited from voting.

I will welcome the suggestions from all of the Members of Congress—I have no doubt that I will get some—on ways and means to strengthen this law and to make it effective. But experience has plainly shown that this is the only path to carry out the command of the Constitution.

To those who seek to avoid action by their National Government in their own communities; who want to and who seek to maintain purely local control over elections, the answer is simple:

Open your polling places to all your people.

Allow men and women to register and vote whatever the color of their skin.

Extend the rights of citizenship to every citizen of this land.

THE NEED FOR ACTION

There is no constitutional issue here. The command of the Constitution is plain.

There is no moral issue. It is wrong—deadly wrong—to deny any of your fellow Americans the right to vote in this country.

There is no issue of States rights or national rights. There is only the struggle for human rights.

I have not the slightest doubt what will be your answer.

The last time a President sent a civil rights bill to the Congress it contained a provision to protect voting rights in Federal elections. That civil rights bill was passed after 8 long months of debate. And when that bill came to my desk from the Congress for my signature, the heart of the voting provision had been eliminated.

This time, on this issue, there must be no delay, no hesitation and no compromise with our purpose.

We cannot, we must not, refuse to protect the right of every American to vote in every election that he may desire to participate in. And we ought not and we cannot and we must not wait another 8 months before we get a bill. We have already waited a hundred years and more, and the time for waiting is gone.

So I ask you to join me in working long hours—nights and weekends, if necessary—to pass this bill. And I don't make that request lightly. For from the window where I sit with the problems of our country I recognize that outside this chamber is the outraged conscience of a nation, the grave concern of many nations, and the harsh judgment of history on our acts.

WE SHALL OVERCOME

But even if we pass this bill, the battle will not be over. What happened in Selma is part of a far larger movement which reaches into every section and State of America. It is the effort of American Negroes to secure for themselves the full blessings of American life.

Their cause must be our cause too. Because it is not just Negroes, but really it is all of us, who must overcome the crippling legacy of bigotry and injustice.

And we shall overcome.

As a man whose roots go deeply into Southern soil I know how agonizing racial feelings are. I know how difficult it is to reshape the attitudes and the structure of our society.

But a century has passed, more than a hundred years, since the Negro was freed. And he is not fully free tonight.

It was more than a hundred years ago that Abraham Lincoln, a great President of another party, signed the Emancipation Proclamation, but emancipation is a proclamation and not a fact.

A century has passed, more than a hundred years, since equality was promised. And yet the Negro is not equal.

A century has passed since the day of promise. And the promise is unkept.

The time of justice has now come. I tell you that I believe sincerely that no force can hold it back. It is right in the eyes of man and God that it should come. And when it does, I think that day will brighten the lives of every American.

For Negroes are not the only victims. How many white children have gone uneducated, how many white families have lived in stark poverty, how many white lives have been scarred by fear, because we have wasted our energy and our substance to maintain the barriers of hatred and terror?

So I say to all of you here, and to all in the Nation tonight, that those who appeal to you to hold on to the past do so at the cost of denying you your future.

This great, rich, restless country can offer opportunity and education and hope to all: black and white, North and South, sharecropper and city dweller. These are the enemies: poverty, ignorance, disease. They are the enemies and not our fellow man, not our neighbor. And these enemies too, poverty, disease and ignorance, we shall overcome.

AN AMERICAN PROBLEM

Now let none of us in any sections look with prideful righteousness on the troubles in another section, or on the problems of our neighbors. There is really no part of America where the promise of equality has been fully kept. In Buffalo as well as in Birmingham, in Philadelphia as well as in Selma, Americans are struggling for the fruits of freedom.

This is one Nation. What happens in Selma or in Cincinnati is a matter of legitimate concern to every American. But let each of us look within our own hearts and our own communities, and let each of us put our shoulder to the wheel to root out injustice wherever it exists.

As we meet here in this peaceful, historic chamber tonight, men from the South, some of whom were at Iwo Jima, men from the North who have carried Old Glory to far corners of the world and brought it back without a stain on it, men from the East and from the West, are all fighting together without regard to religion, or color, or region, in Viet-Nam. Men from every region fought for us across the world 20 years ago.

And in these common dangers and these common sacrifices the South made its contribution of honor and gallantry no less than any other region of the great Republic—and in some instances, a great many of them, more.

And I have not the slightest doubt that good men from everywhere in this country, from the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico, from the Golden Gate to the harbors along the Atlantic, will rally together now in this cause to vindicate the freedom of all Americans. For all of us owe this duty; and I believe that all of us will respond to it.

Your President makes that request of every American.

PROGRESS THROUGH THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS

The real hero of this struggle is the American Negro. His actions and protests, his courage to risk safety and even to risk his life, have awakened the conscience of this Nation. His demonstrations have been designed to call attention to injustice, designed to provoke change, designed to stir reform.

He has called upon us to make good the promise of America. And who among us can say that we would have made the same progress were it not for his persistent bravery, and his faith in American democracy.

For at the real heart of battle for equality is a deep-seated belief in the democratic process. Equality depends not on the force of arms or tear gas but upon the force of moral right; not on recourse to violence but on respect for law and order.

There have been many pressures upon your President and there will be others as the days come and go. But I pledge you tonight that we intend to fight this battle where it should be fought: in the courts, and in the Congress, and in the hearts of men.

We must preserve the right of free speech and the right of free assembly. But the right of free speech does not carry with it, as has been said, the right to holler fire in a crowded theater. We must preserve the right to free assembly, but free assembly does not carry with it the right to block public thoroughfares to traffic.

We do have a right to protest, and a right to march under conditions that do not infringe the constitutional rights of our neighbors. And I intend to protect all those rights as long as I am permitted to serve in this office.

We will guard against violence, knowing it strikes from our hands the very weapons which we seek—progress, obedience to law, and belief in American values.

In Selma as elsewhere we seek and pray for peace. We seek order. We seek unity. But we will not accept the peace of stifled rights, or the order imposed by fear, or the unity that stifles protest. For peace cannot be purchased at the cost of liberty.

In Selma tonight, as in every—and we had a good day there—as in every city, we are working for just and peaceful settlement. We must all remember that after this speech I am making tonight, after the police and the FBI and the Marshals have all gone, and after you have promptly passed this bill, the people of Selma and the other cities of the Nation must still live and work together. And when the attention of the Nation has gone elsewhere they must try to heal the wounds and to build a new community.

This cannot be easily done on a battleground of violence, as the history of the South itself shows. It is in recognition of this that men of both races have shown such an outstandingly impressive responsibility in recent days—last Tuesday, again today.

RIGHTS MUST BE OPPORTUNITIES

The bill that I am presenting to you will be known as a civil rights bill. But, in a larger sense, most of the program I am recommending is a civil rights program. Its object is to open the city of hope to all people of all races.

Because all Americans just must have the right to vote. And we are going to give them that right.

All Americans must have the privileges of citizenship regardless of race. And they are going to have those privileges of citizenship regardless of race.

But I would like to caution you and remind you that to exercise these privileges takes much more than just legal right. It requires a trained mind and a healthy body. It requires a decent home, and the chance to find a job, and the opportunity to escape from the clutches of poverty.

Of course, people cannot contribute to the Nation if they are never taught to read or write, if their bodies are stunted from hunger, if their sickness goes untended, if their life is spent in hopeless poverty just drawing a welfare check.

So we want to open the gates to opportunity. But we are also going to give all our people, black and white, the help that they need to walk through those gates.

THE PURPOSE OF THIS GOVERNMENT

My first job after college was as a teacher in Cotulla, Texas, in a small Mexican-American school. Few of them could speak English, and I couldn't speak much Spanish. My students were poor and they often came to class without breakfast, hungry. They knew even in their youth the pain of prejudice. They never seemed to know why people disliked them. But they knew it was so, because I saw it in their eyes. I often walked home late in the afternoon, after the classes were finished, wishing there was more that I could do. But all I knew was to teach them the little that I knew, hoping that it might help them against the hardships that lay ahead.

Somehow you never forget what poverty and hatred can do when you see its scars on the hopeful face of a young child.

I never thought then, in 1928, that I would be standing here in 1965. It never even occurred to me in my fondest dreams that I might have the chance to help the sons and daughters of those students and to help people like them all over this country.

But now I do have that chance—and I'll let you in on a secret—I mean to use it. And I hope that you will use it with me.

This is the richest and most powerful country which ever occupied the globe. The might of past empires is little compared to ours. But I do not want to be the President who built empires, or sought grandeur, or extended dominion.

I want to be the President who educated young children to the wonders of their world. I want to be the President who helped to feed the hungry and to prepare them to be taxpayers instead of taxeaters.

I want to be the President who helped the poor to find their own way and who protected the right of every citizen to vote in every election.

I want to be the President who helped to end hatred among his fellow men and who promoted love among the people of all races and all regions and all parties.

I want to be the President who helped to end war among the brothers of this earth.

And so at the request of your beloved Speaker and the Senator from Montana; the majority leader, the Senator from Illinois; the minority leader, Mr. McCulloch, and other Members of both parties, I came here tonight—not as President Roosevelt came down one time in person to veto a bonus bill, not as President Truman came down one time to urge the passage of a railroad bill—but I came down here to ask you to share this task with me and to share it with the people that we both work for. I want this to be the Congress, Republicans and Democrats alike, which did all these things for all these people.

Beyond this great chamber, out yonder in 50 States, are the people that we serve. Who can tell what deep and unspoken hopes are in their hearts tonight as they sit there and listen. We all can guess, from our own lives, how difficult they often find their own pursuit of happiness, how many problems each little family has. They look most of all to themselves for their futures. But I think that they also look to each of us.

Above the pyramid on the great seal of the United States it says—in Latin—"God has favored our undertaking."

God will not favor everything that we do. It is rather our duty to divine His will. But I cannot help believing that He truly understands and that He really favors the undertaking that we begin here tonight.

Source: National Archives and Records Administration, The Lyndon B. Johnson Library and Museum (<http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/johnson/archives.hom/speeches.hom/650315.htm>)

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. "Address at the Conclusion of the Selma to Montgomery March"

March 25, 1965

My dear and abiding friends, Ralph Abernathy, and to all of the distinguished Americans seated here on the rostrum, my friends and co-workers of the state of Alabama, and to all of the freedom-loving people who have assembled here this afternoon from all over our nation and from all over the world: Last Sunday, more than eight thousand of us started on a mighty walk from Selma, Alabama. We have walked through desolate valleys and across the trying hills. We have walked on meandering highways and rested our bodies on rocky byways. Some of our faces are burned from the outpourings of the sweltering sun. Some have literally slept in the mud. We have been drenched by the rains. [*Audience:*] (*Speak*) Our bodies are tired and our feet are somewhat sore.

But today as I stand before you and think back over that great march, I can say, as Sister Pollard said—a seventy-year-old Negro woman who lived in this community during the bus boycott—and one day, she was asked while walking if she didn't want to ride. And when she answered, "No," the person said, "Well, aren't you tired?" And with her ungrammatical profundity, she said, "My feets is tired, but my soul is rested." (*Yes, sir. All right*) And in a real sense this afternoon, we can say that our feet are tired, (*Yes, sir*) but our souls are rested.

They told us we wouldn't get here. And there were those who said that we would get here only over their dead bodies, (*Well. Yes, sir. Talk*) but all the world today knows that we are here and we are standing before the forces of power in the state of Alabama saying, "We ain't goin' let nobody turn us around." (*Yes, sir. Speak*) [*Applause*]

Now it is not an accident that one of the great marches of American history should terminate in Montgomery, Alabama. (*Yes, sir*) Just ten years ago, in this very city, a new philosophy was born of the Negro struggle. Montgomery was the first city in the South in which the entire Negro community united and squarely faced its age-old oppressors. (*Yes, sir. Well*) Out of this struggle, more than bus [*de*]segregation was won; a new idea, more powerful than guns or clubs was born. Negroes took it and carried it across the South in epic battles (*Yes, sir. Speak*) that electrified the nation (*Well*) and the world.

Yet, strangely, the climactic conflicts always were fought and won on Alabama soil. After Montgomery's, heroic confrontations loomed up in Mississippi, Arkansas, Georgia, and elsewhere. But not until the colossus of segregation was challenged in Birmingham did the conscience of America begin to bleed. White America was profoundly aroused by Birmingham because it witnessed the whole community of Negroes facing terror and brutality with majestic scorn and heroic courage. And from the wells of this democratic spirit, the nation finally forced Congress (*Well*) to write legislation (*Yes, sir*) in the hope that it would eradicate the stain of Birmingham. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 gave Negroes some part of their rightful dignity, (*Speak, sir*) but without the vote it was dignity without strength. (*Yes, sir*)

Once more the method of nonviolent resistance (*Yes*) was unsheathed from its scabbard, and once again an entire community was mobilized to confront the adversary. (*Yes, sir*) And again the brutality of a dying order shrieks across the land. Yet, Selma, Alabama, became a shining moment in the conscience of man. If the worst in American life lurked in its dark streets, the best of American instincts arose passionately from across the nation to overcome it. (*Yes, sir. Speak*) There never was a moment in American history (*Yes, sir*) more honorable and more inspiring than the pilgrimage of clergymen and laymen of every race and faith pouring into Selma to face danger (*Yes*) at the side of its embattled Negroes.

The confrontation of good and evil compressed in the tiny community of Selma (*Speak, speak*) generated the massive power (*Yes, sir. Yes, sir*) to turn the whole nation to a new course. A president born in the South (*Well*) had the sensitivity to feel the will of the country, (*Speak, sir*) and in an address that will live in history as one of the most passionate pleas for human rights ever made by a president of our nation, he

pledged the might of the federal government to cast off the centuries-old blight. President Johnson rightly praised the courage of the Negro for awakening the conscience of the nation. *(Yes, sir)*

On our part we must pay our profound respects to the white Americans who cherish their democratic traditions over the ugly customs and privileges of generations and come forth boldly to join hands with us. *(Yes, sir)* From Montgomery to Birmingham, *(Yes, sir)* from Birmingham to Selma, *(Yes, sir)* from Selma back to Montgomery, *(Yes)* a trail wound in a circle long and often bloody, yet it has become a highway up from darkness. *(Yes, sir)* Alabama has tried to nurture and defend evil, but evil is choking to death in the dusty roads and streets of this state. *(Yes, sir. Speak, sir)* So I stand before you this afternoon *(Speak, sir. Well)* with the conviction that segregation is on its deathbed in Alabama, and the only thing uncertain about it is how costly the segregationists and Wallace will make the funeral. *(Go ahead. Yes, sir)* *[Applause]*

Our whole campaign in Alabama has been centered around the right to vote. In focusing the attention of the nation and the world today on the flagrant denial of the right to vote, we are exposing the very origin, the root cause, of racial segregation in the Southland. Racial segregation as a way of life did not come about as a natural result of hatred between the races immediately after the Civil War. There were no laws segregating the races then. And as the noted historian, C. Vann Woodward, in his book, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, clearly points out, the segregation of the races was really a political stratagem employed by the emerging Bourbon interests in the South to keep the southern masses divided and southern labor the cheapest in the land. You see, it was a simple thing to keep the poor white masses working for near-starvation wages in the years that followed the Civil War. Why, if the poor white plantation or mill worker became dissatisfied with his low wages, the plantation or mill owner would merely threaten to fire him and hire former Negro slaves and pay him even less. Thus, the southern wage level was kept almost unbearably low.

Toward the end of the Reconstruction era, something very significant happened. *(Listen to him)* That is what was known as the Populist Movement. *(Speak, sir)* The leaders of this movement began awakening the poor white masses *(Yes, sir)* and the former Negro slaves to the fact that they were being fleeced by the emerging Bourbon interests. Not only that, but they began uniting the Negro and white masses *(Yeah)* into a voting bloc that threatened to drive the Bourbon interests from the command posts of political power in the South.

To meet this threat, the southern aristocracy began immediately to engineer this development of a segregated society. *(Right)* I want you to follow me through here because this is very important to see the roots of racism and the denial of the right to vote. Through their control of mass media, they revised the doctrine of white supremacy. They saturated the thinking of the poor white masses with it, *(Yes)* thus clouding their minds to the real issue involved in the Populist Movement. They then directed the placement on the books of the South of laws that made it a crime for Negroes and whites to come together as equals at any level. *(Yes, sir)* And that did it. That crippled and eventually destroyed the Populist Movement of the nineteenth century.

If it may be said of the slavery era that the white man took the world and gave the Negro Jesus, then it may be said of the Reconstruction era that the southern aristocracy took the world and gave the poor white man Jim Crow. *(Yes, sir)* He gave him Jim Crow. *(Uh huh)* And when his wrinkled stomach cried out for the food that his empty pockets could not provide, *(Yes, sir)* he ate Jim Crow, a psychological bird that told him that no matter how bad off he was, at least he was a white man, better than the black man. *(Right sir)* And he ate Jim Crow. *(Uh huh)* And when his undernourished children cried out for the necessities that his low wages could not provide, he showed them the Jim Crow signs on the buses and in the stores, on the streets and in the public buildings. *(Yes, sir)* And his children, too, learned to feed upon Jim Crow, *(Speak)* their last outpost of psychological oblivion. *(Yes, sir)*

Thus, the threat of the free exercise of the ballot by the Negro and the white masses alike *(Uh huh)* resulted in the establishment of a segregated society. They segregated southern money from the poor whites; they segregated southern mores from the rich whites; *(Yes, sir)* they segregated southern churches from Christianity *(Yes, sir)*; they segregated southern minds from honest thinking; *(Yes, sir)* and they segregated

the Negro from everything. *(Yes, sir)* That's what happened when the Negro and white masses of the South threatened to unite and build a great society: a society of justice where none would prey upon the weakness of others; a society of plenty where greed and poverty would be done away; a society of brotherhood where every man would respect the dignity and worth of human personality. *(Yes, sir)*

We've come a long way since that travesty of justice was perpetrated upon the American mind. James Weldon Johnson put it eloquently. He said:

We have come over a way

That with tears hath been watered. *(Yes, sir)*

We have come treading our paths

Through the blood of the slaughtered. *(Yes, sir)*

Out of the gloomy past, *(Yes, sir)*

Till now we stand at last

Where the white gleam

Of our bright star is cast. *(Speak, sir)*

Today I want to tell the city of Selma, *(Tell them, Doctor)* today I want to say to the state of Alabama, *(Yes, sir)* today I want to say to the people of America and the nations of the world, that we are not about to turn around. *(Yes, sir)* We are on the move now. *(Yes, sir)*

Yes, we are on the move and no wave of racism can stop us. *(Yes, sir)* We are on the move now. The burning of our churches will not deter us. *(Yes, sir)* The bombing of our homes will not dissuade us. *(Yes, sir)* We are on the move now. *(Yes, sir)* The beating and killing of our clergymen and young people will not divert us. We are on the move now. *(Yes, sir)* The wanton release of their known murderers would not discourage us. We are on the move now. *(Yes, sir)* Like an idea whose time has come, *(Yes, sir)* not even the marching of mighty armies can halt us. *(Yes, sir)* We are moving to the land of freedom. *(Yes, sir)*

Let us therefore continue our triumphant march *(Uh huh)* to the realization of the American dream. *(Yes, sir)* Let us march on segregated housing *(Yes, sir)* until every ghetto or social and economic depression dissolves, and Negroes and whites live side by side in decent, safe, and sanitary housing. *(Yes, sir)* Let us march on segregated schools *(Let us march, Tell it)* until every vestige of segregated and inferior education becomes a thing of the past, and Negroes and whites study side-by-side in the socially-healing context of the classroom.

Let us march on poverty *(Let us march)* until no American parent has to skip a meal so that their children may eat. *(Yes, sir)* March on poverty *(Let us march)* until no starved man walks the streets of our cities and towns *(Yes, sir)* in search of jobs that do not exist. *(Yes, sir)* Let us march on poverty *(Let us march)* until wrinkled stomachs in Mississippi are filled, *(That's right)* and the idle industries of Appalachia are realized and revitalized, and broken lives in sweltering ghettos are mended and remolded.

Let us march on ballot boxes, *(Let's march)* march on ballot boxes until race-baiters disappear from the political arena.

Let us march on ballot boxes until the salient misdeeds of bloodthirsty mobs *(Yes, sir)* will be transformed

into the calculated good deeds of orderly citizens. (*Speak, Doctor*)

Let us march on ballot boxes (*Let us march*) until the Wallaces of our nation tremble away in silence.

Let us march on ballot boxes (*Let us march*) until we send to our city councils (*Yes, sir*), state legislatures, (*Yes, sir*) and the United States Congress, (*Yes, sir*) men who will not fear to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with thy God.

Let us march on ballot boxes (*Let us march. March*) until brotherhood becomes more than a meaningless word in an opening prayer, but the order of the day on every legislative agenda.

Let us march on ballot boxes (*Yes*) until all over Alabama God's children will be able to walk the earth in decency and honor.

There is nothing wrong with marching in this sense. (*Yes, sir*) The Bible tells us that the mighty men of Joshua merely walked about the walled city of Jericho (*Yes*) and the barriers to freedom came tumbling down. (*Yes, sir*) I like that old Negro spiritual, (*Yes, sir*) "Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho." In its simple, yet colorful, depiction (*Yes, sir*) of that great moment in biblical history, it tells us that:

Joshua fit the battle of Jericho, (*Tell it*)

Joshua fit the battle of Jericho, (*Yes, sir*)

And the walls come tumbling down. (*Yes, sir. Tell it*)

Up to the walls of Jericho they marched, spear in hand. (*Yes, sir*)

"Go blow them ramhorns," Joshua cried,

"Cause the battle am in my hand." (*Yes, sir*)

These words I have given you just as they were given us by the unknown, long-dead, dark-skinned originator. (*Yes, sir*) Some now long-gone black bard bequeathed to posterity these words in ungrammatical form, (*Yes, sir*) yet with emphatic pertinence for all of us today. (*Uh huh*)

The battle is in our hands. And we can answer with creative nonviolence the call to higher ground to which the new directions of our struggle summons us. (*Yes, sir*) The road ahead is not altogether a smooth one. (*No*) There are no broad highways that lead us easily and inevitably to quick solutions. But we must keep going.

In the glow of the lamplight on my desk a few nights ago, I gazed again upon the wondrous sign of our times, full of hope and promise of the future. (*Uh huh*) And I smiled to see in the newspaper photographs of many a decade ago, the faces so bright, so solemn, of our valiant heroes, the people of Montgomery. To this list may be added the names of all those (*Yes*) who have fought and, yes, died in the nonviolent army of our day: Medgar Evers, (*Speak*) three civil rights workers in Mississippi last summer, (*Uh huh*) William Moore, as has already been mentioned, (*Yes, sir*) the Reverend James Reeb, (*Yes, sir*) Jimmy Lee Jackson, (*Yes, sir*) and four little girls in the church of God in Birmingham on Sunday morning. (*Yes, sir*) But in spite of this, we must go on and be sure that they did not die in vain. (*Yes, sir*) The pattern of their feet as they walked through Jim Crow barriers in the great stride toward freedom is the thunder of the marching men of Joshua, (*Yes, sir*) and the world rocks beneath their tread. (*Yes, sir*)

My people, my people, listen. (*Yes, sir*) The battle is in our hands. (*Yes, sir*) The battle is in our hands in Mississippi and Alabama and all over the United States. (*Yes, sir*) I know there is a cry today in Alabama,

(Uh huh) we see it in numerous editorials: "When will Martin Luther King, SCLC, SNCC, and all of these civil rights agitators and all of the white clergymen and labor leaders and students and others get out of our community and let Alabama return to normalcy?"

But I have a message that I would like to leave with Alabama this evening. *(Tell it)* That is exactly what we don't want, and we will not allow it to happen, *(Yes, sir)* for we know that it was normalcy in Marion *(Yes, sir)* that led to the brutal murder of Jimmy Lee Jackson. *(Speak)* It was normalcy in Birmingham *(Yes)* that led to the murder on Sunday morning of four beautiful, unoffending, innocent girls. It was normalcy on Highway 80 *(Yes, sir)* that led state troopers to use tear gas and horses and billy clubs against unarmed human beings who were simply marching for justice. *(Speak, sir)* It was normalcy by a cafe in Selma, Alabama, that led to the brutal beating of Reverend James Reeb.

It is normalcy all over our country *(Yes, sir)* which leaves the Negro perishing on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of vast ocean of material prosperity. It is normalcy all over Alabama *(Yeah)* that prevents the Negro from becoming a registered voter. *(Yes)* No, we will not allow Alabama *(Go ahead)* to return to normalcy. *[Applause]*

The only normalcy that we will settle for *(Yes, sir)* is the normalcy that recognizes the dignity and worth of all of God's children. The only normalcy that we will settle for is the normalcy that allows judgment to run down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream. *(Yes, sir)* The only normalcy that we will settle for is the normalcy of brotherhood, the normalcy of true peace, the normalcy of justice.

And so as we go away this afternoon, let us go away more than ever before committed to this struggle and committed to nonviolence. I must admit to you that there are still some difficult days ahead. We are still in for a season of suffering in many of the black belt counties of Alabama, many areas of Mississippi, many areas of Louisiana. I must admit to you that there are still jail cells waiting for us, and dark and difficult moments. But if we will go on with the faith that nonviolence and its power can transform dark yesterdays into bright tomorrows, we will be able to change all of these conditions.

And so I plead with you this afternoon as we go ahead: remain committed to nonviolence. Our aim must never be to defeat or humiliate the white man, but to win his friendship and understanding. We must come to see that the end we seek is a society at peace with itself, a society that can live with its conscience. And that will be a day not of the white man, not of the black man. That will be the day of man as man. *(Yes)*

I know you are asking today, "How long will it take?" *(Speak, sir)* Somebody's asking, "How long will prejudice blind the visions of men, darken their understanding, and drive bright-eyed wisdom from her sacred throne?" Somebody's asking, "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?" Somebody's asking, "When will the radiant star of hope be plunged against the nocturnal bosom of this lonely night, *(Speak, speak, speak)* plucked from weary souls with chains of fear and the manacles of death? How long will justice be crucified, *(Speak)* and truth bear it?" *(Yes, sir)*

I come to say to you this afternoon, however difficult the moment, *(Yes, sir)* however frustrating the hour, it will not be long, *(No sir)* because "truth crushed to earth will rise again." *(Yes, sir)*

How long? Not long, *(Yes, sir)* because "no lie can live forever." *(Yes, sir)*

How long? Not long, *(All right. How long)* because "you shall reap what you sow." *(Yes, sir)*

How long? *(How long?)* Not long: *(Not long)*

Truth forever on the scaffold, *(Speak)*

Wrong forever on the throne, (*Yes, sir*)

Yet that scaffold sways the future, (*Yes, sir*)

And, behind the dim unknown,

Standeth God within the shadow,

Keeping watch above his own.

How long? Not long, because the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice. (*Yes, sir*)

How long? Not long, (*Not long*) because:

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord; (*Yes, sir*)

He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored; (*Yes*)

He has loosed the fateful lightning of his terrible swift sword; (*Yes, sir*)

His truth is marching on. (*Yes, sir*)

He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat; (*Speak, sir*)

He is sifting out the hearts of men before His judgment seat. (*That's right*)

O, be swift, my soul, to answer Him! Be jubilant my feet!

Our God is marching on. (*Yeah*)

Glory, hallelujah! (*Yes, sir*) Glory, hallelujah! (*All right*)

Glory, hallelujah! Glory, hallelujah!

His truth is marching on. [*Applause*]

http://kingencyclopedia.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/documentsentry/doc_address_at_the_conclusion_of_selma_march/index.html

Press

The Montgomery Advertiser, March 10, 1965

Rights March Turned Back

Selma -- State troopers quietly turned back a massive right-to-vote march led Tuesday by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who had begun the pilgrimage to Alabama's capital in defiance of a federal court ruling and a plea by President [Lyndon] Johnson...

...The march he made brought him face to face with a stern Maj. John Cloud, commanding a force of more than 100 blue-helmeted troopers, armed with billy clubs. Five hundred troopers had poured into Selma in advance of the march.

"This march is not conducive to the safety of those using the highways," said Cloud. He spoke as he stood at the head of a line of troopers massed across the pavement. He ordered the marchers to return to their church...

The Selma Times-Journal, March 11, 1965

Alabama is Disfigured

(Reprinted from *The Anniston Star*)

...The confrontation of Negro ambitions and the power of the law was provocative, but in that moment's surrender to the heady application of overwhelming force we lost the opportunity to show that we are equal to the sharpest demand of courage -- the courage of restraint.

Governor [George] Wallace was absolutely correct in directing that the protest march planned by the Negro leadership be stopped...

...Disagreement with the governor's instructions could have been expressed more sensibly by appeal to the injunctive powers of the law, not by flouting the law, or by some more sane public expression not endangering lives and property...

...We will never know, now, because of the hasty swinging of clubs and lashes, the hurried use of tear gas, the angry pursuit by mounted possemen that portrayed Alabama as the home of Cossacks and head-crackers unable to cope with a situation like this without losing control.

Those who planned this march did not act wisely, but proud and decent Alabamians cannot endorse the reckless brute force used against it Sunday...

The Chicago Tribune, March 12, 1965

Letters to the Editor: The March at Selma

...Tear gas, whips, and clubs were used to implement the charge by the troopers to disperse the Negroes.

The actions of the troopers were those of a police state effecting its will upon the populace by brute force and terrorism...

...It's the duty of the federal government and President [Lyndon] Johnson to intervene and restore civilization to the south.

John Charles Moore
Wheaton, IL

Some say the police did not have to use tear gas and nightsticks on the marchers at Selma, Ala. How else were the police going to get the marchers out of the way? Those people got exactly that they deserved and what they expected. They were looking for publicity and sympathy.

David W. Shiflet
Wilmette, IL

The Washington Post, March 17, 1965

Letters to the Editor: Reactions to Selma

The good people of a great state have been sullied with shame. What on earth has become of the hundreds of thousands of educated, intelligent and basically brave citizens of Alabama? Where are its Senators, Representatives, public officials sworn to uphold the Constitution...

...How long must the Nation and the world wait for the Americanism, Christianity, respect for law and for fellow human beings of the great majority of the people of Alabama to rescue that State from the infamy into which it has fallen?

James P. Davis
Falls Church, VA

The picture of Alabama State Troopers using clubs, tear gas, and, some say, bull whips on men, women and children was enough to make any decent person feel sick, revolted and furious. If the caption was missing... one might almost think this was a photo from Nazi Germany...

Florence Sherman
Washington, DC

The Washington Post, March 31, 1965

Letter to the Editor: Publicity and Protest

Alabama has been invaded by thousands of civil rights demonstrators... in the biggest publicity stunt of the Twentieth Century -- the Selma to Montgomery March...

...It should be apparent by now that this latest and greatest publicity stunt is all part of a campaign to remove government by law and substitute government by demonstration. The specter these demonstrations in Alabama and elsewhere create is nothing less than the threat of anarchy. Our officials are being blackmailed by sit-ins, mass marchers, traffic obstruction and business stoppage to force them to give in to the unending demands of power-hungry demonstration leaders.

John Railami
Silver Spring, MD

http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/eyesontheprize/story/10_march.html