

Bridge To Freedom (1965)

NARRATOR: Selma, Alabama, 1965.

C. T. VIVIAN: I don't want to ... (inaudible) leave. We have come to register to vote.

RACHEL WEST NELSON: If we can't vote, you ain't free. If you ain't free, well then you're slaves.

C. T. VIVIAN: We're willing to be beaten for democracy.

NARRATOR: Years of struggle came down to this climactic battle for voting rights. Before it ended, black and white Americans gave their lives. But would that be enough?

C. T. VIVIAN: You people beat people bloody in order that they will not have the privilege to vote.

MALCOLM X: In the areas of the country where the government has proven itself unable or unwilling to defend the Negroes when they are being brutally and unjustly attacked, then the Negroes themselves should take whatever steps necessary to defend themselves.

NARRATOR: To many Americans, black and white, this was their worst nightmare. Race riots in northern cities during the summer of 1964. The civil rights movement was ten years old, nonviolence had been the strategy. But could nonviolence work in a society which grew angrier each day?

GUNNAR JAHN: On behalf of the Nobel Committee --

NARRATOR: To the world, Martin Luther King, Jr., had come to symbolize the success of nonviolent strategy. He received the Nobel Peace Prize in December, 1964.

GUNNAR JAHN: -- and the gold medal.

NARRATOR: But in America, young militants were beginning to challenge King's leadership. Dallas County, Selma, Alabama. For more than a year, organizers from the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, SNCC, had worked with local residents in waging a voter registration campaign. They met some resistance.

By the end of 1964, SNCC was exhausted, with little money to continue. Selma's black leaders turned to Martin Luther King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference for help.

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.: Today marks the beginning of a determined, organized, mobilized campaign.

NARRATOR: King's presence reopened an old rivalry between the ministers of SCLC and the young organizers of SNCC.

JAMES FORMAN: We felt that there should be a projection and an organization of indigenous leadership and leadership from the community. Whereas the Southern Christian Leadership Conference took the position that Martin was a charismatic leader who was mainly responsible for raising money and they raised most money off of his leadership. But this differences in leadership then led to differences in style of work. We wanted a movement that would survive the loss of our lives; therefore, the necessity to build a broad based movement and not just a charismatic leader.

NARRATOR: SNCC and SCLC put aside their differences and launched a combined effort on January 18th, 1965. The Dallas County courthouse steps became a dramatic stage as prospective voters lined up for the registrar's office in Selma. The key actor was Sheriff Jim Clark. Movement leaders counted on Clark to draw media attention, the kind of attention that would interest Washington and win voting rights legislation.

MAYOR SMITHERMAN: I am a segregationist. I do not believe in biracial committees.

NARRATOR: Selma's political leaders understood the movement's tactics and were desperate not to get caught in the middle. Mayor Joseph Smitherman and his public safety director, Wilson Baker, hoped to restrain the volatile Sheriff Clark as he dealt with the demonstrators.

JOSEPH SMITHERMAN: They picked Selma just like a movie producer would pick a set. You had the right ingredients. I mean, you'd had to have seen Clark in his day. He had a helmet on like General Patton, he had the clothes, the Eisenhower jacket and a swagger stick, and then Baker was very impressive and I guess I was the least of all. I was 145 pounds and a crew cut and big ears. So you had a young mayor with no background or experience.

MAYOR SMITHERMAN: Our city and our county has been subjected to the greatest pressures I think any community in the country has had to withstand. We've had in our area here outside agitation groups of all levels. We've had Martin Luther Coon -- Pardon me, sir, Martin Luther King, we have had people of the Nazi Party, the States Rights Party, both of these groups have come in, they have continually harassed and agitated us for approximately three or four weeks.

NARRATOR: More than half of Dallas County's citizens were black, but less than one percent were registered by 1965. Throughout much of the South, custom and law had long prevented blacks from registering. In Selma, the registrar's office was open only two days a month. Registrars would arrive late, leave early, and take long lunch hours. Few blacks who lined up would get in. And getting in was no guarantee of being registered.

President Johnson knew the problem, and now having soundly defeated conservative Barry Goldwater in the recent election, he set this goal.

PRESIDENT LYNDON B. JOHNSON: I propose that we eliminate every remaining obstacle to the right and the opportunity to vote.

NARRATOR: But Johnson's staff had doubts about pushing for more legislation.

NICHOLAS KATZENBACH: I think those of us who had been involved day in and day out in civil rights legislation, in getting the 1964 Civil Rights Act through Congress were the people who were dragging our feet and wanted breathing room. The President didn't want that. He said, "Get it and get it now because we'll never have a better opportunity to get legislation on any subject including civil rights than we have right now in 1965. We have the majority to do it, we can do it."

NARRATOR: Although Sheriff Clark tried to control his temper, the strain began to show. In mid-January, he arrested Mrs. Amelia Boynton, a highly respected community leader. Angered by Mrs. Boynton's arrest, 105 local teachers marched to the courthouse in protest, knowing they might be fired by the white school board.

SHERIFF CLARK: This court house is a serious place of business and you seem to think you can take it just to be, uh, Disneyland or something on parade. Do you have business in the court house?

TEACHER: We just, we just want to pass through.

SHERIFF CLARK: Do you have any business in the court house?

TEACHER: The only business we have is to come by the Board of Registrars to register...

SHERIFF CLARK: The Board of Registrars is not in session this afternoon as you were informed. You came down to make a mockery out of this court house and we're not going to have it.

REV. FREDERICK D. REESE: So I saw then that he was not going to arrest us, as I really wanted him to do. Therefore, we asked the teachers then to regroup and we marched back, not to the school but to the Brown Chapel Church, at which time there was a rally held.

NARRATOR: The teachers march was the first black middle class demonstration in Selma. Sheyann Webb and Rachel West were schoolchildren at the time.

SHEYANN WEBB: And it was a amazing to see how many teachers had participated. I remember vividly on that day when I saw my teachers marching with me, you know, just for the right to vote.

RACHEL WEST NELSON: Teachers there was somewhat like up in the upper class, you know. People looked up to teachers then, they looked up to preachers. They were somewhat like leaders for back then.

REV. FREDERICK D. REESE: Then the undertakers got a group and they marched. The beauticians got a group, they marched. Everybody marched after the teachers marched because teachers had more influence than they ever dreamed in the community.

C. T. VIVIAN: And we want you to know, gentlemen, that every one of you, we know your badge numbers, we know your names.

NARRATOR: In mid-February, Reverend C. T. Vivian, an SCLC organizer, confronted Sheriff Clark and his deputies on the courthouse steps.

C. T. VIVIAN: But believe me, there were those that followed Hitler, like you blindly follow this Sheriff Clark who didn't think their day was coming. But they also were pulled into courtrooms and they were also given their death sentences. You're not this bad a racist, but you're a racist in the same way Hitler was a racist. And you're blindly following a man that's leading you down a road that's going to bring you into federal court. Now, I'm representing people in Dallas County and I have that right to do so. Now, and as I represent them and they can speak for themselves, is what I'm saying true? Is it what you think and what you believe? For this is not a local problem, gentlemen. This is a national problem. You can't keep anyone in the United States from voting without hurting the rights of all other citizens. Democracy is built on this. This is why every man has the right to vote, regardless.

JIM CLARK: And he started shouting at me that I was a Hitler, I was a brute, I was a Nazi. I don't remember everything he called me. And I did lose my temper then.

C. T. VIVIAN: We have come to be here because they are registering at this time.

SHERIFF CLARK: Turn that light out. You're blinding me and I can't enforce the law with the light in my face.

C. T. VIVIAN: We have come to register and this is our reason for being here. We're not --

SHERIFF CLARK: You're blinding me with that light. Move back.

C. T. VIVIAN: You can arrest us. You can arrest us, Sheriff Clark. You don't have to beat us.

JIM CLARK: I don't remember even hitting him, but I went to the doctor, got an x-ray and found out I had a linear fracture on my finger on my left hand.

C. T. VIVIAN: With Jim Clark, it was a clear engagement between the forces and movements and the forces of the structure that would destroy movement. It was a clear engagement between those who wished the fullness of their personalities to be met and

those that would destroy us physically and psychologically. You do not walk away from that. This is what movement meant. Movement meant that finally we were encountering on a mass scale the evil that had been destroying us on a mass scale. You do not walk away from that, you continue to answer it.

C. T. VIVIAN: If we're wrong, why don't you arrest us?

POLICEMAN: Why don't you get out of in front of the camera and go on. Go on.

C. T. VIVIAN: It's not a matter of being in front of the camera. It's a matter of facing your sheriff and facing your judge. We're willing to be beaten for democracy, and you misuse democracy in this street. You beat people bloody in order that they will not have the privilege to vote. You beat me in the side and then hide your blows. We have come to register to vote.

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR: I'm here to tell you tonight that the businessmen, the mayor of this city, the police commissioner of this city, and everybody in the white power structure of this city must take a responsibility for everything that Jim Clark does and has created. It's time for us to say to these men that if you don't do something about it, we will have no alternative but to engage in broader and more drastic forms of civil disobedience in order to bring the attention of a nation to this whole issue in Selma, Alabama.

NARRATOR: The campaign in Selma escalated when violence erupted during a march in a neighboring town.

RICHARD VALERIANI: The march in Marion, Alabama, was a nighttime march, and a nighttime march was always dangerous. And there was always discussion within the movement whether or not to have nighttime marches because they knew they were dangerous. We went up there this night, and we knew there was going to be trouble right away because local folks came up to us and threatened us, sprayed our cameras with black paint so we couldn't shoot, ordered us to put the cameras down and harassed us. And it was a very tense situation.

ALBERT TURNER: The whole town was surrounded at night by auxiliary police, state troopers, ... (inaudible) and anybody who wanted to come in, really, who felt like beating folks up. We went around the side of the church and after getting back into the church, some of us tried to go back in the front door and some of us just went where we could because as we moved, they also moved. They was whipping us as we went.

RICHARD VALERIANI: Somebody walked up behind me and hit me with a knife handle, hit me in the head with a knife handle, drew blood, which required stitches, and I was taken to a hospital. 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 you."

NARRATOR: That same night, a young man named Jimmy Lee Jackson attempted to protect his mother from a similar attack. He was shot at point blank range by an Alabama state trooper and died eight days later.

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR: He was murdered by the irresponsibility of every politician from governors on down who have fed his constituents a stale bread of hatred and the spoiled meat of racism. He was murdered by the timidity of a federal government that can spend millions of dollars a day to keep troops in South Vietnam and cannot protect the lives of its own citizens seeking the right to vote.

JOHN LEWIS: I just felt during the period, it was too much, too much, too many, too many funerals and some of us will say, "How many more?" We were infuriated to a point that we wanted to carry Jimmy's body to George Wallace and dump it on the steps of the Capitol. We had got ... (inaudible) like the white folk or we had determined or decided that we were going to get killed or we was going to be free and be frank about it. And all of us just about felt that way. So we had intended to do everything we could because we was made, I guess you see, and we said that we would take Jimmy down and just put his casket on the doorsteps of the Capitol.

REV. JAMES BEVEL: In the nonviolent movement, if you went back to some of the classical strategies of Gandhi, when you have, say, a great violation of the people and there's a great sense of injury, you have to give people an honorable means and context in which to express and eliminate that grief and speak decisively and succinctly back to the issue. Otherwise, your movement will break down in violence and chaos.

NARRATOR: As a response to Jimmy Lee Jackson's death, SCLC proposed a symbolic march that would begin in Selma and travel 54 miles to the capitol in Montgomery.

REV. JAMES BEVEL: So agreeing to go to Montgomery was that kind of tool that would absorb a tremendous amount of energy and effort, and it was to keep the issue of disenfranchisement before the whole nation. And the whole point was walking from Selma to Montgomery, it'd take you five or six days, and which would give you the time to discuss in the nation through the papers, radio, television and going around speaking what the real issues were.

NARRATOR: Governor Wallace was determined that the march would not take place.

GOV. GEORGE C. WALLACE: Such action will not be allowed on the part of any other group of citizens or non-citizens of the state of Alabama and will not be allowed in this instance. The government must proceed in an orderly manner and lawful and law abiding citizens must transact their business with the government in such a manner. There will be no march between Selma, Alabama and Montgomery, and I have so instructed the Department of Public Safety.

NARRATOR: Despite the governor's ban, 600 people gathered at Brown Chapel AME Church on Sunday, March 7th, to begin the march to Montgomery. Dr. King was preaching in Atlanta. Hosea Williams and John Lewis led the march. Lewis chose to march, even though his organization, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, opposed SCLC strategy and decided not to take part. Surprisingly, as they walked through the center of town, there were no police in sight. The route out of Selma crossed over the Edmund Pettus Bridge.

RACHEL WEST NELSON: Sheyann and I went to the Edmund Pettus Bridge. There is where I turned around and left Sheyann simply because I'm saying I was afraid.

NARRATOR: Waiting on the other side were Alabama state troopers under orders from Governor Wallace to stop the marchers. Clark's posse was on the sideline.

MAJOR JOHN CLOUD: It would be detrimental to your safety to continue this march and I'm saying that this is an unlawful assembly. You have to disperse, you are ordered to disperse. Go home or go to your church. This march will not continue. Is that clear to you? I've got nothing further to say to you.

SHEYANN WEBB: 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, Holver (?) Williams, and I told him to put me down. He wasn't running fast enough. And I ran and I ran and I ran.

ANDREW YOUNG: 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.

NARRATOR: Shock gave way to anger. There was talk of retaliation.

ANDREW YOUNG: There were people who came back to the church and started talking about going to get their guns. You had to talk them down, and you had to talk them down by simply asking questions, "What kind of gun you got?" ".32, .38." "How's that going to hold up against the automatic rifles and 10 gauge shotguns that they've got? And how many you got? There are at least 200, you know, shotguns out there with buckshot in them. You ever see buckshot? You ever see what buckshot does to a deer?" And most of them had. And you make people think about the specifics of violence and then they realize how suicidal and nonsensical it is.

NARRATOR: The day after Bloody Sunday, Governor Wallace reprimanded law enforcement officers for the scene on the bridge.

GOV. GEORGE C. WALLACE: It was something that happened that enraged me because I didn't intend for it to happen that way. But I didn't want them to get beyond that point where there was some people that told me there might be some violence.

NARRATOR: Sunday night, the television networks broke into regular programming to show these scenes to a national audience. ABC interrupted its primetime movie, "Judgment at Nuremberg," a film about Nazi war crime.

JOSEPH SMITHERMAN: When that beating happened at the foot of the bridge, it looked like a war that went all over the country. And then people, the wrath of the nation came down on us.

ATTORNEY GENERAL KATZENBACH: Governor Wallace had made clear his intention to prevent this march on the grounds of public safety and danger on the highways. And while we knew there would be a confrontation, state and local law enforcement officials were prepared for major disorders. We had no reason to believe that local law enforcement officials would set upon nonviolent and peaceful citizens in the way in which they did. On prior occasions, this has not occurred.

SEN. RALPH YARBOROUGH: Shame on you, George Wallace, for the wet ropes that bruise the muscles, for the bull whips that cut the flesh, for the clubs that broke the bones, and for the tear gas that seared the eyes and the nose and the nostrils and the lungs and choked people into insensibility. This is not the American way.

When this happened at Selma and I saw it on television, to me it expanded beyond civil rights, beyond whether you vote or where you sit in a restaurant, but in a café or on planes, trains, or buses. It became a matter of human life and it became an issue that transcended any of those we're voting on. It became bigger than that.

ANDREW YOUNG: After the beating on the bridge, we immediately sent out a call for our friends. We didn't think we could provide - We could count on police protection. People said we should send in the National Guard. We didn't think they would send in the National Guard to protect black people. And so we sent out a call to people of good will.

NARRATOR: From all over the country, people came to Selma, among them 450 white clergymen.

REV. FREDERICK REESE: The group of people, black and white, send to us, "We are here to share with the people of Selma in this struggle for the right to vote. We have seen on the television screen the violence that took place and we're here to share with you."

And you could see a change in the atmosphere, a spirit of inspiration, motivation and seemingly hope coming back into the eyes and into the minds of these people. And then renewed commitment to the nonviolent method.

NARRATOR: They planned to march on Tuesday, but President Johnson wanted them to wait until they could be sure there would be no violence. In Montgomery, another Johnson, federal judge Frank Johnson, banned the march pending a hearing. Dr. King had never violated a federal order, but there was increasing pressure to march, especially from SNCC. The SCLC ministers left the decision about marching to King. The young members of SNCC, angered by Sunday's attack, wanted to be sure King wouldn't back down.

JAMES FORMAN: You know, federal injunctions and ... (inaudible) have been handed down in the past and really the people here have to make up their minds and make their decisions themselves about what it is they want to do.

NARRATOR: There was private disagreement but public unity.

JAMES FORMAN: There's no disagreement between SNCC and SCLC and that's not -- You know, that's not at issue here.

The announcement was made to the people in the audience that the march that Tuesday would go forward, all right. But some of us also knew that Dr. King had told -- I mean, that Johnson, that he was going to call off the march. So we had a meeting from about 11:00 to 5:00 that morning where we were trying to lay out to him the necessity to keep his word to the people that the march would go forward and that it would not be called off.

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR: We have no alternative but to keep moving with determination. We've gone too far now to turn back.

And in a real sense, we are moving and we cannot afford to stop because Alabama and because our nation has a date with destiny.

NARRATOR: Tuesday, March 9th, 2,000 marchers set out to cross the Pettus Bridge. This time, there were politicians, labor and church leaders, members of SNCC, the widow of a U.S. senator and a few southern whites. They were side by side with those who had been beaten two days earlier.

MAJOR JOHN CLOUD: You are ordered to stop, stand where you are. This march will not commence.

NARRATOR: The marchers asked to kneel and pray.

REV. RALPH ABERNATHY: Because we know that America was founded on the principles that all men are free and equal, not just white men, but all men. We don't have much money, but we do have our bodies. And we live on the altar for Thee and for our freedom today.

NARRATOR: Then Dr. King turned the marchers around and walked back across the bridge. Some expressed relief, others shock.

ORLOFF MILLER: All of a sudden, I realized that the people in front were turning around and coming back and I was aghast. What is going on? Are we not going to go through with this confrontation? What's happening?

ANDREW YOUNG: The truth of it was that there was nothing much else to do. We'd been ordered by a judge not to go any further. If we had run into that police line, they would have beaten us up with court approval.

NARRATOR: SNCC members would call the turnaround a sellout, worsening the split between them and SCLC. For others, there was a sense of confusion.

ORLOFF MILLER: We waited to hear Dr. King's explanation of why this had been. We never fully understood, but what we did understand is saying as many of you as can, could you stay a few more days? Could you remain? Most of us had come without even a toothbrush because we thought it was a one-day event. But nevertheless, a number of us decided to stay, I among them.

NARRATOR: Later that evening, Reverend Miller, along with Ministers Clark, Olson, and James Reeb were returning from dinner. Unfamiliar with the town, they took a wrong turn past the Silver Moon Café.

ORLOFF MILLER: And as we started walking, from across the street there appeared four or five white men. And they yelled at us, "Hey, you niggers." And we did not look across at them, but we just sort of quickened our pace. We didn't run, but continued walking in the same direction. And they apparently came across the street from our left and behind us. And one of them was carrying a club. And Clark said he turned around and saw the club just as it was swung. And Jim Reeb being closest to the curb, caught the full impact of that blow.

NARRATOR: James Reeb died two days later. News of the attack provoked a national outcry. In many cities, demonstrators protested the violence in Selma. Some blacks were angry that the death of a white minister stirred a nation that had ignored the death of Jimmy Lee Jackson.

STOKELY CARMICHAEL: What it seemed to me is that the movement itself is playing into the hands of racism, because what you want as a nation to be upset when anybody is killed, and especially when one of us is killed. And so it just played into the hands of racism and it's almost like, you know, for this to be recognized, a white person must be killed. Well, what are you saying?

NARRATOR: When the police barricaded the area around Brown Chapel, SNCC withdrew from the Selma campaign in frustration. The barricades were to keep hostile whites out, the protesters in. One group, led by Jimmy Webb, broke free of the barricade. They were stopped by Clark's men.

L. C. CROCKER: I can't follow you and I'm not going to follow you and give you police protection. I'm telling you for your own benefit, you had better turn around and get out of this area. You're not going to the cool house in a group under condition that you come here, and I assure you that.

JIMMY WEBB: All we'd like to do, sir, is to go to the courthouse --

L. C. CROCKER: Courthouse is closed. There's no business there, I'm saying.

JIMMY WEBB: We don't want to go into the courthouse, all we want to do is go to the lawn of the courthouse to kneel in prayer and we'll gladly return...

L. C. CROCKER: You take your prayers back to your church. That's the proper place to pray. I'm sure that God will hear your prayer just as well down there as it will up here, but you're not going on this courthouse lawn.

JIMMY WEBB: Sir, whenever there are men who are in sinful conditions, prayers should be uttered wherever they are.

L. C. CROCKER: Then why don't you pray where you are? Go back down and pray. You think you're lily white? You think you'll have ... (inaudible)? Well, then go back to your church and pray.

JIMMY WEBB: Well, sir, can we pray together, you and I?

L. C. CROCKER: You do your praying, I do mine, big boy. You don't pray for me. I don't want you to pray for me.

JIMMY WEBB: Well, will you pray for us?

L. C. CROCKER: Because I don't think your prayers get above your head.

JIMMY WEBB: Well, will you pray for us?

L. C. CROCKER: No, I'm not going to pray for you. I tend to my business, you tend to yours. Now, you better move these people out of here.

MAN: Sir? Sir?

GIRL: You have to know how to love before you can pray.

L. C. CROCKER: I don't have to love anybody I don't want to love. Do your own loving. You love your little niggers, I love who I please.

JIMMY WEBB: Do you believe in equal justice for all?

L. C. CROCKER: I believe in justice.

JIMMY WEBB: Do you believe in equal --

L. C. CROCKER: I don't believe in equal nothing. There's no two people in this world alike, and they're not equal on any terms or conditions. There's no two peas in the world alike, no two pieces of money or nothing else.

JIMMY WEBB: Then sir, are you saying that if I have a quarter and I'm black, and you have a quarter and you're white, then my quarter isn't worth as much as yours?

L. C. CROCKER: That's your quarter. I'll decide what my quarter's worth, you use yours and I use mine.

COP: You buy a catfish sandwich with yours.

L. C. CROCKER: I have nothing else to say.

WILSON BAKER: What's the deal here now. You people in this small group want to turn and walk back to the group waiting on you?

JIMMY WEBB: Do we have your protection?

WILSON BAKER: We'll do everything we can, just go on back down there. You didn't have it coming up here.

NARRATOR: Plans for the march to Montgomery remained at a standstill pending a federal court decision. Now protecting the marchers became an issue for both President Johnson and Governor Wallace.

GEORGE WALLACE: We got a report, how much it would take to guarantee absolute protection from everyone and we didn't have the resources. So I called on President Johnson and Article IV, Section IV of the Constitution to send us troops to help us maintain order.

NARRATOR: Wallace met with President Johnson in Washington on March 13th.

BURKE MARSHALL: And what happened in the meeting was the President totally snowed us. Governor Wallace didn't quite grovel, but he was so pliant by the end of the two hours with President Johnson putting his arm around him and squeezing him and telling him it's a moment of history and how do we want to be remembered in history? Do you want to be remembered as petty little men, or do we want to be remembered as great figures that faced up to our moments of crisis, and that kind of thing. And then he led Governor Wallace out in the hopes that Governor Wallace who was, by that time, like a rubber band, would give a press statement that confirmed his determination to protect the marchers at Selma, to comply with the court order from Judge Johnson and act like a responsible governor.

GOV. WALLACE: Well, all I can say is I'm very hopeful that we can have a solution to the problems that confront us in this regard and that I did request -- I did make some suggestions and I hope that we can have a cessation some time of the demonstrations, although I recognize the right to peacefully assemble. But I do think there are limitations, but that's all.

MAN: Can you tell us, Governor, what the President --

NARRATOR: Governor Wallace still refused to pay for protecting the marchers. President Johnson, sensing the mood of the country, addressed Congress on national television.

PRESIDENT LYNDON B. JOHNSON: What happened in Selma is part of a far larger movement which reaches into every section and state of America. It is the --

NARRATOR: Eight days after Bloody Sunday, four days after Reeb's death, the President asked for a comprehensive Voting Rights bill and astonished the nation by using the words of the movement.

PRESIDENT LYNDON B. JOHNSON: 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.

JOSEPH SMITHERMAN: Lyndon Johnson came on, the late President, and said, "We shall overcome." And it was just like you'd stuck a dagger in your heart or something like that. I mean, you know, what's this guy doing? And, you know, you had respect for your ... (inaudible) we were patriotic, but it just destroyed everything you'd been allegedly fighting for.

C. T. VIVIAN: We were all sitting around together, and Martin was sitting in a chair looking toward the TV set. And when LBJ said, "And we shall overcome," we all cheered and I looked over toward Martin, and Martin was very quietly sitting in the chair and a tear ran down his cheek. It was a victory like none other. It was an affirmation of the movement.

NARRATOR: But SNCC didn't see any victory. In Montgomery, where they had moved operations, they were being beaten by Alabama police as they tried to confront Governor Wallace.

JAMES FORMAN: There's only one man in this country that can stop George Wallace and ... (inaudible). We can present thousands and thousands of bodies in the streets if we want to. And we can have all of the ... (inaudible) and the moral commitment around this world. But a lot of these problems will not be solved until that ... (inaudible) place called the White House begins to shake and gets on the phone and says, "Now listen, George, we're coming down there and throwing you in jail if you don't stop that mess." It's not just the sheriff of this county or the mayor or the police commissioner or George Wallace. This problem goes to the very bottom of the United States. And you know, I said it to them and I will say it again. If we can't sit at the table, let's knock the fucking legs off, excuse me.

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR: Now there are points that we agree on and there are still points that we must negotiate before we come to a final resolution of the problem.

NARRATOR: Martin Luther King tried to calm the situation in Montgomery while waiting, still, for the court decision on the march.

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR: Let me give you this statement which I think will come as an expression to all of us. Judge Johnson has just ruled that we have a legal and Constitutional right to march from Selma to Montgomery.

NARRATOR: The judge's action cleared the way for the march. But Governor Wallace still refused to provide the necessary protection. So President Johnson federalized the Alabama National Guard. Sunday, March 21st, only 62 days after the campaign began, 3,200 people gathered at Brown Chapel Church for the journey to Montgomery.

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR: We are going to walk nonviolently and peacefully to let the nation and the world know we are tired now. We've lived with slavery and segregation 345 years, we waited a long time for freedom. We are trying to remind the nation of the urgency of the moment. Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy. Now is the time to transform Alabama, the heart of Dixie, to a state with a heart for brotherhood and peace and good will. Now is the time to make justice a reality for all of God's children.

REPORTER: Do you have any feelings about this march?

SHERIFF JIM CLARK: No, I'm glad to get rid of the ones who are leaving, but I wish they'd come back and get the rest of them.

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR: How you doing? Wonderful, wonderful. Why are you marching?

SHEYANN WEBB: So we can be free and justice. And so other people can be free and so troopers can't hit no more.

NUN: I'm from Kansas City, Missouri, and I've answered a call for the Interracial Council there in Kansas City to join the march here. These ideals that have been expressed by all the people have been mine for a long time. I've had an opportunity to do something about it now.

ACTOR: I'm from Hollywood, California, I'm an actor. And I just decided I've got to come, I've got to see what it's all about and I feel very deeply about the situation. And for the first time, I realize what the Negro position is, because here I am called a white nigger.

NARRATOR: The Alabama National Guard under federal direction, kept the hecklers at a distance and checked for bombs. Eleven miles outside Selma, the marchers left Dallas County and came into neighboring Lowndes County. While in Lowndes County, some SNCC members seized the opportunity to do some organizing of their own.

KWAME TOURE (STOKELY CARMICHAEL): We were against the march. I, too, was against it. But again, I said it was a fait accompli. We couldn't stop it, King was going to have it, and there was no way to stop it. So what we had to do now is make a positive out of a negative. What I did was when it entered Lowndes County, I would seek out all the people from Lowndes County who came to the march. I would get them, write down their names, record it, their addresses and tell them, you know, "Listen, we're going to stay in Lowndes County, we're not going to pass through." And they'd be excited to hear that. So the Black Panther Party was built off of the mobilization that King sprout out inside of Lowndes County, and he give us a perfect job.

NARRATOR: As they approached Montgomery, SCLC heard of a plot against Martin Luther King's life, but King refused to leave the march.

ANDREW YOUNG: Martin always wore the good preacher blue suit, and I figured since we couldn't stop him from marching, we just kind of had to believe it was true when white folks said we all look alike. So everybody that was about Martin's size and had on a blue suit, I put in the front of the line with him. And we all just lined up, but there were some very important people who felt as though they were being pushed back. But all of the preachers loved the chance to get up front in the front line with Martin Luther King, but I don't think to this day most of them know why they were up there.

NARRATOR: Fifty-four miles and five days marching. They were now 25,000 strong.

JOHN LEWIS: To me, there was never a march like this one before and hasn't been once since. It was a sense of community moving there. And as you walked, you saw people coming, waving, bringing you food or bringing you something to drink. You saw the power of the most powerful country on the face of the Earth.

NARRATOR: The euphoria of the moment, no one could know the traditional civil rights movement would never again be the same. The fragile coalition that had shaped the movement for so long was coming to an end.

CORETTA SCOTT KING: It was a great moment to go back to Montgomery. Because you see for us, it was returning to Montgomery after ten years. And I kept thinking about ten years earlier, how we were visibly just blacks and when you looked at that march, you had Catholic priests and nuns, you had other clergy and you had a lot of white people. It was really a beautiful thing to pass Basker Avenue and go toward the capitol, marching together and listening to Martin's speech.

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR: We must come to see the being we seek. As a society at peace with itself, a society that can live with its conscience. And that will be a day not as a white man, not as a black man, that will be the day of man as man. 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. How long? Not long. Because the arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice. How long? Not long. Because mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord. He's tramping out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored. He's loosed the faithful lightning of his terrible swift sword, his truth is marching on. Glory, hallelujah. Glory, hallelujah. Glory, hallelujah. His truth is marching on.

NARRATOR: That night, Viola Liuzzo, a white housewife from Michigan, was murdered by Klansmen as she transported marchers back to Selma. President Johnson signed the Voting Rights bill into law on August 6th, 1965. By the following summer, 9,000 blacks registered to vote in Dallas County. August 11, five days after the Voting Rights bill was signed, the Watts area of Los Angeles, California, exploded in racial violence. More than 1,000 people were injured, 34 died. It signaled a new direction for the movement, the next phase of America's civil rights years.