



The Ministers' March

March 9, 1965


“The people of Selma will struggle on for the soul of the nation, but it is befitting that all Americans help to bear the burden. I call, therefore, on clergy of all faiths, to join me in Selma.”

--Partial text of telegram issued by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Sunday, March 7, 1965, a day forever etched in American history as “Bloody Sunday,” gave pause to a nation unaccustomed to viewing such malevolence visited upon non-violent protest. In the aftermath of this event, the voting rights movement achieved a large measure of support from across the country. Consequently, the stage was now set for the introduction of voting rights legislation in Congress. On the day following “Bloody Sunday,” Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., speaking from Atlanta, voiced a call for ministers from across the nation to come to Selma, Alabama and march in support of the right to vote. Hundreds of ministers responded to his request where they were warmly received into the homes of many residents of the George Washington Carver Homes near Brown Chapel A.M.E. Church and elsewhere in the city. Meanwhile, Federal District Court Judge Frank Johnson had issued an injunction against another march until a hearing could take place. Dr. King, reluctant to defy the court, agreed to march no further than the other side of the bridge.

“Turnaround Tuesday”

Consequently, on Tuesday, March 9, 1965, 1500 participants, including hundreds of religious leaders, once again made a fateful trek down Sylvan Street (now renamed Martin Luther King Street) from Brown Chapel



A.M.E. Church singing “Ain’t Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around” as they converged on the bridge. After crossing the bridge and reaching the site of “Bloody Sunday”, the leaders halted and knelt to lead the mass group in prayer. Following this, the marchers were led back across the bridge to return to Brown Chapel in Selma.

That night, a clergyman who had marched, Rev. James Reeb, was attacked on a Selma street and later died. In his eulogy, Dr. King said, “Again we must ask the question: Why must good men die for doing good?”

First-person accounts

J.L. Chestnut: *We had a constitutional right to march from Selma to the state capitol in Montgomery on behalf of the right to vote”*

Joanne Bland: *I went back to the church, and when they left I hopped in the line again.*

James Macdonell: *It took about an hour to get everybody lined up and start the march out of town. As we came down the highway, we looked across the highway and there, as far as we could see, were flashing lights and police cars and helmeted troopers carrying shotguns blocking the way.*

John Lewis: *It came to the same point where we had been beaten two days earlier”*

James Macdonell: *Dr. King got on a bull horn and he said, “Folks, we’re gonna have to stop.”*

Joanne Bland: *When the front went down we knelt and we prayed. And we saw Dr. King and Dr. Abernathy, the front line coming back across the bridge. And we didn’t know what was going on. And I think I was the only person on the bridge that day that was relieved that they turned around.*