

# IN RECOGNITION OF THE 44TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE SELMA TO MONTGOMERY CIVIL RIGHTS MARCHES

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SPEECH OF  
HON. DANNY K. DAVIS OF ILLINOIS  
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
MONDAY, APRIL 27, 2009

- Mr. DAVIS of Illinois. Madam Speaker, I wish to take a moment to recognize March 20 as the 44th anniversary of the Selma to Montgomery marches. These historic marches had a profound affect on the voting rights of African Americans throughout the Nation. It is only fitting that the brave individuals who endured brutal physical violence, mental anguish, and often public humiliation in order to secure their voting rights be recognized by this body.

- From the pulpit of Brown Chapel, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., issued a call to action after numerous attempts to enfranchise the black citizens of Selma came to a halt. Over the next several weeks, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Coalition and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference expanded their operations to register black voters in Selma and the surrounding area. At a voting rights protest on February 18th, Jimmie Lee Jackson was shot while attempting to protect his mother and grandfather. Jackson's death prompted Mr. James Bevels of the SCLC to call for a march from Selma to Montgomery. This demonstration of character and faith took place on March 7, 1965. As the peaceful protestors approached the Edmund Pettus Bridge, they were greeted by the Sheriff Department and their clubs, tear gas and bull whips. We remember this day as Bloody Sunday.

- Local photographers and television crews captured the brutality of Bloody Sunday, casting the issue into the national spotlight. Their images of cruelty rallied popular support for the cause of the protestors and set the stage for the second march, which was to occur on March 9th. However, protesters hit a stumbling block, when a restraining order was issued preventing the march. Dr. King led a group of 2500 protesters to the Edmond Pettus Bridge where he held a short prayer; before turning the crowd back, so as to respect the rule of law. It is on March 21, 1965 that we see a successful unimpeded march from Selma to Montgomery Alabama. Under the protection of Federal and State soldiers, FBI agents, and U.S. Marshals, a group of near 8,000 protesters set out from Selma to march for 5 days and 4 nights down Jefferson Davis Highway until they reached the Alabama state capitol. Upon their arrival, the number of protestors swelled to 25,000. This march had a profound impact on public opinion and just 5 months after its conclusion, President Lyndon Johnson signed into law the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

- I am confident that there will always be those who boldly defy oppression and rebuke tyranny at all costs. One March day, Dr. Martin Luther King asked, ``How long will prejudice blind the visions of men,

darken their understanding and, drive bright-eyed wisdom from her sacred throne?" Dr. King answered his question, saying, ``..... Not long, because the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice." It is this spirit that we must cherish. Those who decided to command their own destiny in Selma, Alabama in March of 1965 embody this spirit, and it is my great honor to commemorate their efforts.