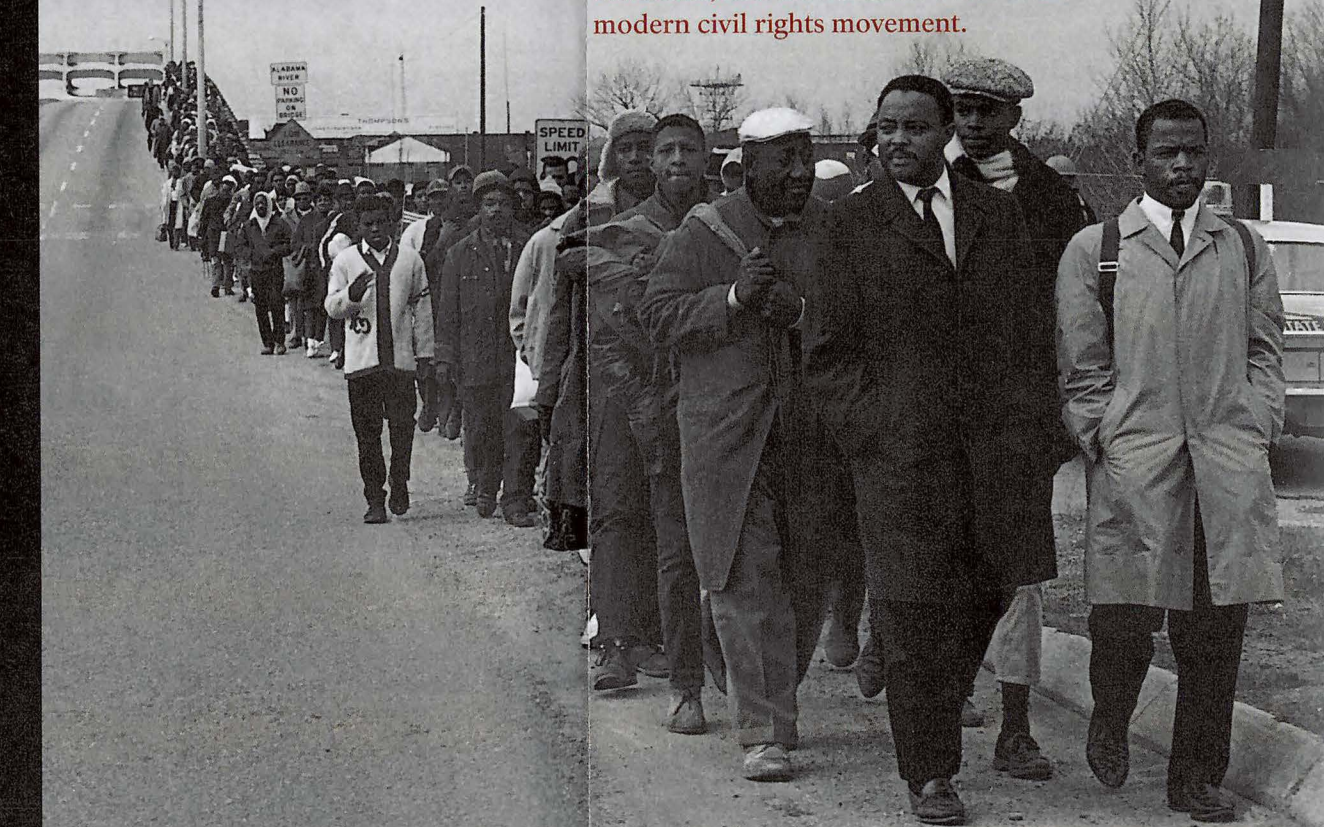




On the first attempt to march, John Lewis (right) and Hosea Williams lead the marchers as they approach waiting state troopers.

COVER: © SPIDER MARTIN/KKK SIGN (ABOVE) © NATIONAL VOTING RIGHTS MUSEUM AND INSTITUTE

The 54-mile march from Selma, Alabama, to the state capitol in Montgomery in 1965 culminated a journey of a hundred years by African Americans to gain one of the most fundamental of American freedoms:

the right to vote.

The peaceful march was possible because courageous citizens, local leaders, and civil rights groups had been demanding that right for months. They had endured harassment, bloodshed, and deaths. The final march was a celebration of their achievement, a procession for fallen comrades, and the climactic event of the modern civil rights movement.



African American farmers who worked the fields of Alabama's "black belt" (named for its dark, productive soil) were denied the vote by unfair laws. They were also harassed by the Ku Klux Klan.



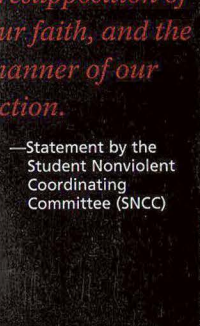
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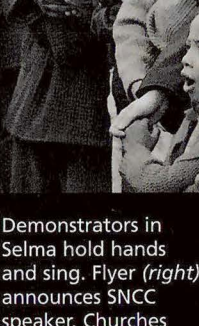
African American men standing in a line, with a sign that reads 'WE SHALL OVERCOME'.



African American men standing in a line, with a sign that reads 'your vote is the one that counts'.



African American men standing in a line, with a sign that reads 'Rev. L. L. Anderson'.



African American men standing in a line, with a sign that reads 'Statement by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)'.



African American men standing in a line, with a sign that reads 'Demonstrators in Selma hold hands and sing'.



African American men standing in a line, with a sign that reads 'Rev. L. L. Anderson'.



African American men standing in a line, with a sign that reads 'Sheriff Clark jabs teachers trying to register'.



African American men standing in a line, with a sign that reads '500 people wait to sign the appearance book'.



African American men standing in a line, with a sign that reads 'We were infuriated to the point that we wanted to carry Jimmie's body'.



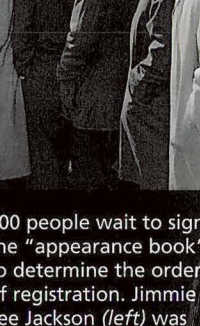
African American men standing in a line, with a sign that reads 'March participant Albert Turner'.



African American men standing in a line, with a sign that reads 'Negro Marchers Gassed, Beaten'.



African American men standing in a line, with a sign that reads 'State troopers beat the leaders of the march with nightsticks'.



African American men standing in a line, with a sign that reads 'Marchers pray at the Edmund Pettus Bridge before returning to Selma'.



African American men standing in a line, with a sign that reads 'American flag (right) to Montgomery, where the Confederate flag flew over the capitol'.



African American men standing in a line, with a sign that reads 'Ain't gonna let nobody turn me round'.



African American men standing in a line, with a sign that reads 'Marching up to freedom land'.



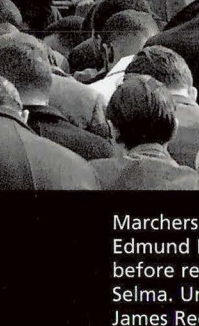
African American men standing in a line, with a sign that reads 'Many newly registered voters (above) voted for candidates of the Lowndes County Freedom Party'.



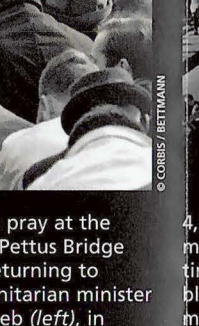
African American men standing in a line, with a sign that reads 'Sheriff Clark out of office in 1966'.



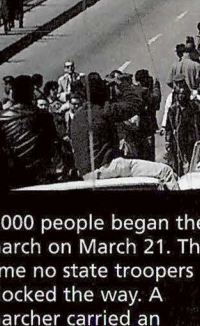
African American men standing in a line, with a sign that reads 'Tent city residents (left)'.



African American men standing in a line, with a sign that reads 'Lowndes County Alabama'.



African American men standing in a line, with a sign that reads 'Background photo'.



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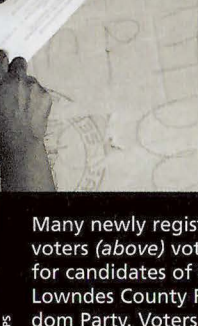
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WHY SELMA?

How did the old cotton port of Selma, Alabama, the seat of Dallas County, become the national focus of the voting rights movement? In 1950 African Americans made up about half of Dallas County's voting-age population. But the county and state had been denying them the right to vote since 1901 through literacy tests, poll taxes, and intimidation. Only 156 of the county's 15,000 voting-age African Americans were registered to vote in 1961.

The county's dismal record led the US Justice Department to request records from county registrars, but it was denied by an unsympathetic judge. The Dallas County Voters League

(DCVL) added a few voters to the rolls in the early 1960s through voter registration classes. In 1963 the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), an advocate of grassroots efforts like those of DCVL, sent representatives to help with the voting clinics.

When African Americans came to the county courthouse to register, county sheriff Jim Clark and his deputies harassed them and attacked SNCC workers. In December 1964 DCVL asked the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), headed by Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., to help. SCLC knew that Clark's violent ways would help draw national attention to the voting rights drive.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The voting rights movement drew on the roots of religion, nonviolence, and music for guidance and for moral and physical courage. Many southern communities prohibited African Americans from gathering in large groups except in their churches, so that is where they met. African American leaders risked economic reprisal in these communities unless they were preachers, who were beholden only to their congregations. Clergy enjoyed moral authority in their communities and could speak persuasively before large groups, so they emerged as the movement's natural leaders. Dr. King, the most famous of these leaders, believed deeply in the principle of "nonviolent direct action" as

the most effective and morally justified strategy for social change.

Earlier nonviolent reform movements, especially the one for India's independence led by Mohandas Gandhi, inspired SNCC and SCLC. The two groups organized sit-ins, rallies, and marches to protest racial discrimination. Such nonviolent protest required profound bravery by participants, who faced jail and injury. They used music for solidarity, to endure long vigils, and to build courage for impending confrontation. Sam Cooke's soaring, gospel-tinted "A Change Is Gonna Come" was a hit in early 1965 and became background music to the struggle in Selma.

A GATHERING OF FORCES

The push for voter registration in Selma picked up momentum when SCLC joined forces with SNCC and DCVL. On January 2, 1965, Dr. King defied an injunction against large gatherings to address a mass rally at Brown Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church. On the 18th some 400 people joined the first voter registration march from the chapel to the county courthouse. Sheriff Clark directed the marchers to an alley, then allowed no one to register. The next day, marchers refused to stand in the alley. Clark ordered them to move. When DCVL's Amelia Boynton responded too slowly, Clark grabbed her collar and shoved her towards a patrol car. Then he arrested 67 other marchers.

When a photo of Boynton's mistreatment appeared in major newspapers, national media turned its eye on Selma and the voting rights movement.

DCVL's president, Rev. Frederick D. Reese, led 105 teachers to the courthouse on January 22. Clark and his deputies pushed them from the steps twice, jabbing them with nightsticks. These courageous teachers inspired their students and others who had been afraid of becoming involved. As more marches and more arrests ensued, Sheriff Clark's excessive responses upset Selma's mayor and public safety director, who were concerned about the city's image and ability to attract industries.

THE CONFLICT TURNS DEADLY

In February, SCLC and SNCC made a tactical move to force the arrest of Dr. King and dramatize the campaign. King and 250 marchers violated a parade ordinance by marching to the courthouse. They were joined by 500 students and hundreds of other supporters. Clark and his men arrested more than 3,000 people, using nightsticks and cattle prods. Many of the marchers were held in prison camps outside town.

During his incarceration, Dr. King wrote his "Letter from a Selma Jail" detailing obstacles facing African Americans who wanted to vote. It was published in the *New York Times* the day he was released. He then joined Congress and the National

BLOODY SUNDAY

On a bright Sunday afternoon in early March, 600 marchers moved slowly up the Edmund Pettus Bridge rising over the Alabama River. SNCC's John Lewis and SCLC's Hosea Williams led them. They had left Brown Chapel singing "Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Round"; now they walked quietly. They could see only the calm river and the bare trees on the far bank.

Reaching the apex of the bridge, they saw below what Lewis described as a "sea of blue"—Alabama state troopers blocking US 80. Sheriff Clark's posse waited on horses. The marchers stopped a few yards short of the troopers, asking to speak to their leader. They were given

TURNAROUND TUESDAY

As state troopers continued to beat marchers past the Brown Chapel area, enraged onlookers called for retaliation. It was a pivotal moment in the voting rights campaign: The principle of nonviolence was being tested in the heat of attack. The leaders were able to convince those ready to fight that retaliation could only hurt the movement. They had to keep the sympathy they had earned. News stations brought their efforts into the national spotlight by televising images of troopers beating unresisting marchers. Dr. King called on the nation's clergy to come to Selma for another attempt to march. But Federal District Court Judge Frank Johnson issued an injunction against another march until a

WITNESSES FOR FREEDOM

A week later the long-sought goal finally appeared close. President Johnson called on Congress to pass a voting rights bill; on the next day Judge Johnson lifted the injunction against the march in Selma. Jubilation replaced fear, but local resistance remained fierce. That same day marchers in Montgomery were brutally beaten, causing Dr. King to respond angrily, "the cup of endurance has run over."

LET US MARCH

On March 21 some 4,000 marchers set out from Selma. They marched until US 80 (Jefferson Davis Highway) narrowed to two lanes; then the march was restricted to 300 people. Most of this core group marched all 54 miles, stopping at four campsites. As they approached the Alabama State Capitol in Montgomery, their numbers swelled again to a jubilant 25,000. The hard-won fight and the march honoring it had given meaning to the promise made a century earlier in the 15th Amendment: "The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude."

IN THE WAKE OF THE MARCH

After the triumphal march, the movement met tragedy again that night. Viola Liuzzo had come from Detroit to help. After she had carried marchers back to Selma, members of the Ku Klux Klan sped alongside her car and shot her. (See map on other side.) Resistance to change would die hard.

THE WAKE OF THE MARCH

SNCC continued to work with African Americans in Alabama, organizing the Lowndes County Freedom Organization. This evolved into a political party, the first to adopt a black panther symbol. On August 6th President Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act, which suspended literacy tests, called for the appointment of federal election monitors, and directed

THE WAKE OF THE MARCH

the US Attorney General to challenge the use of poll taxes by states. But laws cannot end bigotry. That month Jonathan Daniels, an Episcopal seminarian helping desegregation efforts in Hayneville, Alabama, was shot and killed. Lowndes County landowners evicted tenants who registered. In December SNCC and Lowndes County leaders helped several evicted families set up a "tent city" off US 80, then helped them find jobs, permanent housing, and new lives. In the end the hard work bore fruit: By 1966 the number of registered African Americans in Alabama was four times the number of 1960.

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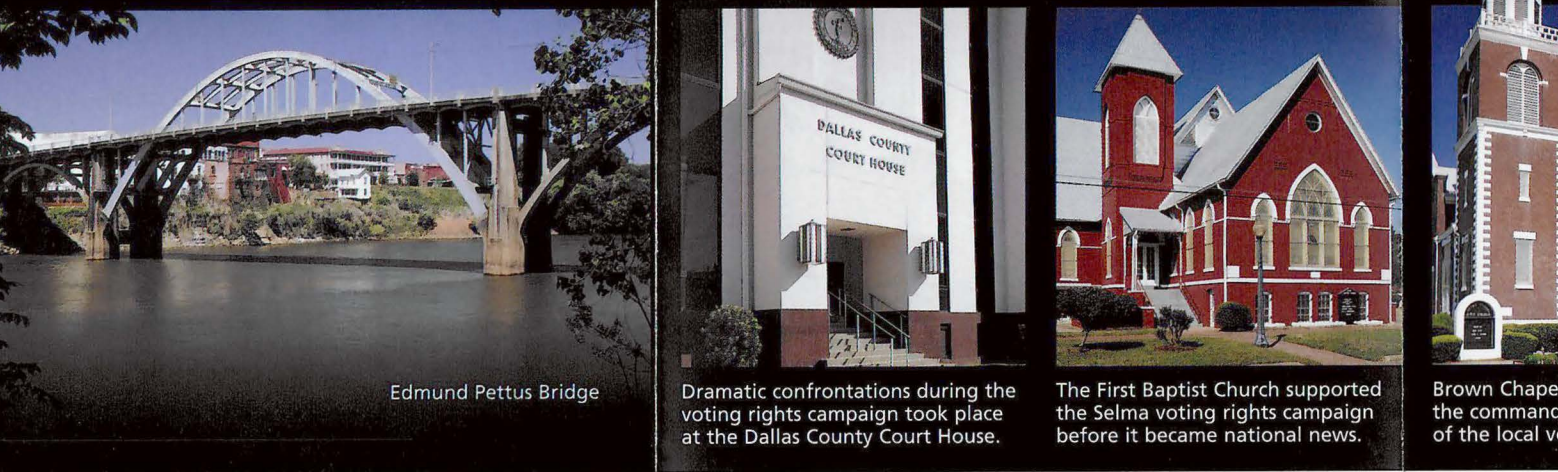
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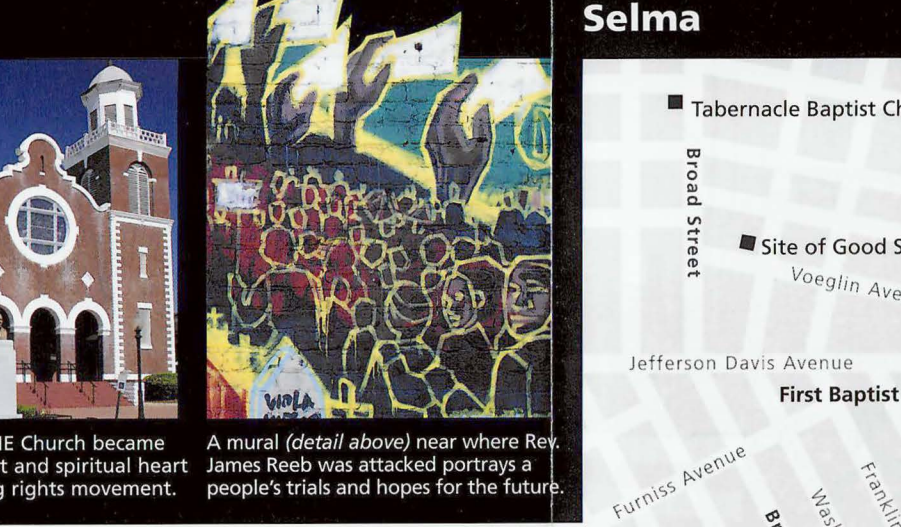
Following the Trail



Courage, hate, triumph, fear, hope— powerful emotions are evoked by the sites related to the 1965 voting rights march from Selma to Montgomery. For those who had a role in the events, memories haunt these places. For others the experience is indirect but also deeply felt.

Because photographs and film of the events played so crucial a role in the struggle, these images and today's historic sites enrich each other. The streets and buildings, many virtually unchanged, help us engage more deeply with recorded scenes from five decades ago. At the same time the old images make the sites resonate with the passions of a stormy era. Standing before them is like watching an old newsreel, our imagination calling up the cries and confusion from that terrible, noble time.

Some of the sites inspire, as they summon again the idealism and purpose that drove the voting rights movement. Others make us uncomfortable—commemorating the death of an innocent, marking a place where people suffered bigotry and brutality—but this is why they are so important. These places will not let us forget.



Selma: Echoes of the Struggle

Selma remains a small, quiet town. We suggest you start your visit at the Selma Interpretive Center at the corner of Broad and Water. Park rangers can answer questions and provide historical context for the story. Then follow the self-guiding tour of major sites connected with the voting rights drive.

Dallas County Court House This was the destination for most voting rights marches in Selma. Those trying to register were confronted with bureaucratic obstacles or roughly removed from the premises.

Edmund Pettus Bridge On March 7—"Bloody Sunday"—marchers crossed this bridge as they left Selma; on the other side they were beaten back by state troopers blocking US 80.

First Baptist Church This church took the early lead in the voting rights struggle in Selma and Dallas County. Members allowed the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) to use the church as its organizational base and rallying point when it arrived in Selma in 1963.

Cecil C. Jackson Public Safety Building Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and other marchers

Selma



George Washington Carver Homes Many participants in the Selma marches lived in this large housing complex. Marchers and civil rights workers from out of town were lodged here.

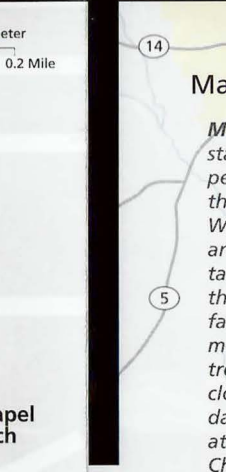
Sullivan Building The SNCC and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) directed their local voting rights activities from this building.

To make the most of your time: If you have two hours: Take the Martin Luther King, Jr. Street Historic Walking Tour and see the Bloody Sunday confrontation site.

If you have half a day: Take the Martin Luther King, Jr. Street Historic Walking Tour (Brown Chapel AME Church, First Baptist Church, Carver Homes) and see the Dallas County Court House and the Bloody Sunday confrontation site.

Tabernacle Baptist Church Site of the first mass meeting on voting rights in Selma, 1963.

Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail

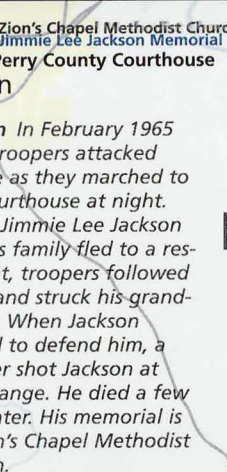


Marion In February 1965 state troopers attacked people as they marched to the courthouse at night. When Jimmie Lee Jackson and his family fled to a restaurant, troopers followed them and struck his grandfather. When Jackson moved to defend him, a trooper shot Jackson at close range. He died a few days later. His memorial is at Zion's Chapel Methodist Church.

At the Lowndes County Line US 80 narrowed from four lanes to two. A court order allowing the march stipulated only 300 people could walk this part of the road, both to keep one lane open for traffic and because the narrow, rural road through the county would be the most dangerous part of the march. Three hundred people would be much easier to guard than 4,000.

Tent City In Lowndes County, white landowners retaliated against tenant farmers who registered, voted, or engaged in any voting rights activities by throwing them off their land. The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and Lowndes County leaders helped families stay together and remain in the county. They bought tents, cots, heaters, food, and water, and helped several families build a temporary "tent city." Residents were often harassed and shot at, but they persevered for nearly two years as they searched for jobs and permanent housing.

Montgomery



City of Saint Jude, a Catholic institution with a hospital, school, and church, was the last campsite for marchers and the site of a musical rally the night before the final leg of the march into Montgomery.

City of Saint Jude In the 1930s the Catholic Church established a health and education complex open to everyone, which was unheard of in the segregated South. It offered space for the march's last campsite and the "Stars for Freedom" rally. Performers included Harry Belafonte, Joan Baez, Mahalia Jackson, Sidney Poitier, Sammy Davis Jr., and the trio Peter, Paul, and Mary.

Dexter Avenue King Memorial Baptist Church Known then as Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, it was the staging area for the final rally at the capitol. It had been the headquarters of the

Montgomery: Resistance and Change



Alabama State Capitol After Jimmie Lee Jackson was killed, some people wanted to carry his body to the capitol as a protest. Instead, leaders organized the memorial march from Selma to Montgomery. State troopers barred marchers from the capitol steps, so speakers stood on a truck to address the crowd.

Related Sites **Alabama Department of Archives and History** Exhibits place the civil rights movement in the context of state history.

Civil Rights Memorial Center (at the Southern Poverty Law Center) Exhibits and a memorial by designer Maya Lin honor those slain from 1955 to 1968.

Rosa Parks Library and Museum Exhibits document Parks' courageous act of civil disobedience that led to the 1955 Montgomery bus boycott.

Trenholm State Archives Exhibits about the civil rights movement.

About Your Visit



Retrace the 54-mile march beginning at Brown Chapel in Selma. Take US 80 to Montgomery; follow signs to the Alabama State Capitol.

The Lowndes Interpretive Center in White Hall and the Selma Interpretive Center in Selma (see maps; film, exhibits, bookstore) are open Monday–Saturday 9:00 am–4:30 pm and are closed Thanksgiving, December 25, and January 1.

Safety and Regulations Wear comfortable walking shoes. • Drink plenty of water. • Watch for snakes, poison ivy, and fire ants. • For firearms regulations check the park website.

Accessibility We strive to make our facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. For information call or check the park website.

More Information



Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail 7002 US 80 West Hayneville, AL 36040 334-877-1984 www.nps.gov/semo

In 1996 Congress established Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail. To learn more about National Park Service programs in America's communities, visit www.nps.gov.

National Park Foundation Join the park community. www.nationalpark.org

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