

## Section E. Historic Contexts

### I. Emancipation, Reconstruction and the roots of the Civil Rights Movement, 1863-1900

The Civil Rights Movement in Selma, the seat of Dallas County, Alabama, has deep roots.<sup>1</sup> From 1865 to 1875 the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution and the process of Reconstruction across Alabama brought an uncertain but welcome degree of freedom to the lives of African Americans in Selma. Uncertainty came from two directions: (1) the actual commitment of the federal government to enforce its own laws in a region overtly hostile to even the presence of the federal government, and, (2) the real threat of intimidation and violence. From the beginning, Reconstruction was violent in Selma and Dallas County. As early as August 1865, Maj. J.B. Houston, provost marshal for the Freedman's Bureau based in Selma, was reporting a dozen cases of white-on-black violence in his jurisdiction and admitted that these cases were "but a small part of those that have actually been perpetrated [sic]."<sup>2</sup> The Freedmen's Bureau combined with various white missionary groups to give limited support and encouragement to the newly emancipated African American citizens of Selma. Most of the gains made came from African Americans themselves as they created churches, schools, and cemeteries as key community-centered institutions, the first steps to asserting their place not only within the society but also within the actual physical landscape of the town.

Churches and segregated schools in the late nineteenth century played a key role as safe havens, centers of community and identity for African Americans in Selma. These institutions also helped to create a middle-class African American community, which

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<sup>1</sup> The research presented here owes much to assistance of many Selma citizens, most especially Louretta Wimberly, who has provided guidance, access, and council from the beginning. Many citizens attended public meetings associated with the fieldwork or talked with me individually about their properties and their families, including Rachel Lowe, Linda Derry, Joyce O'Neal, Sallie B. Jackson, Charlotte Griffeth, Henry Thompson, Carolyn Doyle King, L.D. King, Lillie Thompson, Charles Dinkins, Fay Hudson, Randy Williams, George Wilson, Betty Boynton, Bruce Boynton, Richie Jean Sherrod Jackson, J. B. Hill, John Rawls, Sheryl Smedley, Susan Keith, Candace C. Johnson, Henry E. Allen, Doris Cox, Joe Bumbrey, Theodora Hatcher, Robert Batson, JoAnne Bland, Crandell C. Brown, Alvin Cleveland, Phillis Leashore, Thomas E. Curry, Sarah Craig, Mattie Davis, Rev. Woodrow Johnson, Bruce Hill, Carrie Barnes, Cliff Chesnut, Alston Fitts, III, Diane P. Walter, Dr. Verdell L. Dawson, the Tabernacle Church History Committee, Sam Walker, Pearlie L. Walker, Rev. Willis Harris, Rev. Bennie L. Tucker, Don Bevel, and Anthony Bates and his colleagues at the National Park Service. Acknowledgement must be made as well to Mary Shell and Dorothy Walker of the Alabama Historical Commission for their assistance. As John Lewis observed in his memoirs, *Walking with the Wind* (1998): "Selma was more of a bottom-up campaign, of the people acting with minimal direction from the leaders. We were there to guide and help carry out what the people wanted to do, but it was essentially the people themselves who pointed the way." (307) That observation holds true for this research: the people have pointed the way and we have tried to convey their directions and insights throughout the fieldwork and research of this National Register assessment.

<sup>2</sup> Major J. P. Houston to Gen. Carl Schurz, August 22, 1865, reprinted in Message of the President of the United States to U.S. Senate, December 19, 1865 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1865), 71-72.

provided leadership and socio-economic stability for Selma's black citizens. Another key pattern was the expansion of African American neighborhoods and the general segregation of space within the town. From 1865 to 1875 the core African American neighborhood was northeast and east of the central business district and south of the railroad corridor: here was the location of First Colored Baptist Church (1845, NR), Brown Chapel AME Church (1867, NHL), and Second Missionary Baptist Church (1869). In the last two decades of the nineteenth century, African American institutions spread further north of the central business district, crossing the town's distinctive railroad corridor and spilled into a new section of town west of Broad Street and north of Jefferson Davis Avenue (now J. J. Chestnut Avenue). By 1900 this northwest section of town held such important new institutions as Selma University, key Baptist, CME, and AME churches, and a new black business district. The grid of streets created in the post-war decades remained intact throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. By the nationally significant events of the 1960s, the streets and sidewalks of the town helped to define the path of protest events and thus became part of the physical landscape that experienced the overall conflict for civil rights and voting rights in Selma during those years.

### Churches

The move to create African American churches came immediately, and almost simultaneously, with Emancipation. The Baptists had been the first to establish an African American congregation in Selma, when the white-dominated First Baptist Church allowed slaves and free blacks to form a congregation in c. 1845, a precursor to what became known as the First Colored Baptist Church. The initial white-dominated First Baptist Church was owned by both races with the upper floor paid for and built by the whites while black members owned and resided in the basement. In 1864, there were four active black Baptist congregations in Alabama, with the early church in Selma being one of those four. The end of the Civil War soon multiplied the number of congregations. Rev. Charles O. Boothe observed in his turn-of-the-century compilation of black Baptist institutions:

The change which the war had wrought as to the civil status of the black man, changing him from slave to freedman, affected his church standing, so that ex-master and ex-slave did not quite fit each other in the old "meeting house," as they had done in days of yore. There was restlessness on one side, and suspicion on the other. The black man wanted to go out and set up housekeeping for himself, while the white man in most cases feared and hesitated to lay on the hands of ordination. We did not know each other. The "negro preacher" on one side of the river had but little opportunity to know his brother on the other side. Truly our beginning was dark and chaotic.<sup>3</sup>

Other early institutions were often established with the assistance of the Freedman's Bureau and missionaries from the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, the African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AME Zion) church, the American Baptist Home

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<sup>3</sup> C. O. Boothe, *Cyclopedia of the Colored Baptists of Alabama* (Birmingham: Alabama Publishing House, 1895), 34.

Mission Society, the American Missionary Association (AMA) and other groups. In 1866 African Americans formally established a new First Colored Baptist Church (now known as First Baptist Church) on St. Philip Street out of the earlier c. 1845 arrangement with whites that established the town's earlier Baptist church building. According to local Selma historian Alston Fitts III, "The black church's tradition is that the white Baptists generously gave them \$2000 to assist with construction. The white church's tradition is that the black members tried to 'take over' the church, in which they formed a majority, and were scared off when pastor J.B. Hawthorne met them at the door with a pistol."<sup>4</sup> The latter is probably the case, considering the level of violence in Selma's Reconstruction era. But the Selma Baptists continued to grow in number and influence. In 1869 in East Selma, the Second (Missionary) Baptist Church was formed by Rev. H. (J?) Blevins and became a center for the expansion of the African American neighborhood in this part of town. The 1871 and 1872 state black Baptist conventions took place at First Colored Baptist Church, acknowledging its leadership role not only locally but in the general Baptist movement in Alabama.

The black Baptists who formed First Colored Baptist Church began to divide into new congregations during Reconstruction, with the creation of Second Baptist Church in 1869. The next major split came in 1881 when black Baptists created Green Street Baptist, led by former First Baptist minister Rev. John Blevins. In 1885 another Baptist group established the Tabernacle Baptist Church, which by the 1890s was led by the influential minister Charles Price Jones and had moved to the northwest part of town, closer to the campus of Selma University. In 1894 First Baptist Church built a new brick sanctuary just south of the railroad tracks, constructed for "not less than \$20,000—finest colored church edifice in Alabama,"<sup>5</sup> reasserting its prominence within the town and the general Baptist movement. First Baptist Church had evolved into a mother church for all other Missionary Baptist groups in the city. Local African American builder David West was the designer of the church's new Victorian-styled sanctuary, and its basement floor became a community center for the surrounding neighborhoods in northeast Selma.

The black Methodist church also had an early presence in Reconstruction-era Selma. In 1866, Rev. James Wadsworth established what became the Clinton Chapel AME Zion church on Green Street. On August 30, 1867, local black Methodists separated from the white-dominated Methodist Episcopal Church South and created the state's first AME congregation, what is known today as Brown Chapel AME church. After the formation of the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church (CME) in Jackson, Tennessee, in 1870, Selma Methodists later created St. Paul CME Church in 1891. Nearby another group of black Methodists established Ward Chapel AME Church by the end of the century. Both St Paul CME and Ward Chapel AME church stood in the center of the northwest Selma neighborhood, creating yet another sacred space for African Americans in this expanding part of town.

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<sup>4</sup> Alston Fitts, III, *Selma: Queen City of the Blackbelt* (Selma, AL: Clairmont Press, 1989), 73.

<sup>5</sup> Boothe, 107.

Another Reconstruction-era church that served as a community foundation for African Americans was the Reformed Presbyterian Church, which came to Selma in 1874 as the congregation's first mission church for African Americans in the United States. It soon established Knox Academy and the church and school became new landmarks on the street (now Jeff Davis Avenue) that divided north (mostly black) and south (mostly white) Selma in the late nineteenth century.

What did the new churches mean to the sense of empowerment and stability within Selma's African American community? Rev. Boothe probably summed it up best in 1895:

With homeless mothers and fathers, with homeless wives and children, and with oppression on every side--with all these burdens and much more which cannot be told upon us--we bravely undertook the work of building the walls of Zion. The writer knows a minister who, (between 1866 and 1875, especially between '66-'77, during the reign of the "K. K. Klan," when the people could not in many places be induced to open their doors after dark for fear of being shot), has endured some of the severest privations and performed some of the hardest toils known to the ministry, at his own charges. This case is only one in hundreds. Our ministry, whatever the faults and imperfections which have attended them, have wrought nobly and wrought to good results.<sup>6</sup>

### Schools

Creating African American schools also happened simultaneously with Emancipation and Reconstruction in Selma as freed men and women worked with various missionary groups and churches. For example, the Pittsburgh Freedmen's Aid Commission was supporting a Selma school as early as 1865.<sup>7</sup> By the end of the year, however, African American leaders recognized that these limited private initiatives were inadequate. On December 1865, First Colored Baptist deacon Alexander Goldsby, Baptist minister Daniel Alexander, Rev. James Wadsworth of the AME Zion church, and 14 other citizens published an appeal calling for more support for African American schools.<sup>8</sup> In response, Joseph H. Sears, county superintendent of education, in 1866 opened a black school in the basement of First Colored Baptist Church. American Missionary Association (AMA) leader John Silsby of Wisconsin opened a second school in a building owned by local African American Methodists. Then Sears and Silsby joined with the AMA and the Freedman's Bureau to create Burrell Academy, named after Jabez Burrell of Oberlin, Ohio, who gave \$10,000 to build a black school in Selma.<sup>9</sup>

Silsby was like many white AMA leaders in the South—largely contemptuous of the freedman but capable of admitting that “there exists a class among them who are

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 240-241.

<sup>7</sup> Loren Schweninger, “The American Missionary Association and Northern Philanthropy in Reconstruction Alabama,” *Alabama Historical Quarterly* 33(Fall/Winter 1970): 129-32.

<sup>8</sup> Fitts, 70-71.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

acquiring property, intelligence, and character.”<sup>10</sup> He pushed the AMA to fully fund Burrell Academy (not extant), which opened in June 1869 with a qualified northern faculty, offering black children educational opportunities from primary to normal school. The AMA allowed Selma to operate the academy as a public school but by 1875 the city did not want to continue the arrangement because it did not want to use northern teachers and within two years the city had full control of the school. In the mid-1870s political Reconstruction in Selma was over and whites asserted their dominance over most public institutions. The AMA and local black citizens later reopened a new Burrell Academy as a private school in 1889. Then fire destroyed the campus in 1900 and within four years the school had moved to Florence, Alabama.<sup>11</sup>

The Reformed Presbyterian Church created Knox Academy in Selma in 1874. Knox became the second key African American school in late nineteenth century Selma, and by 1881 students attended a large brick Victorian-style building (not extant), which continued to serve black students into the 1930s. The church supported the school as a mission but also as an education outreach since its leadership was appalled at the general indifference to African American education shown by local and state officials. In April 1887, Reformed Presbyterian leader Hugh W. Read observed that Alabama had for African Americans “a so-called school system. . . . in order to recognize a school one would need to see the title, ‘This is a school,’ over the door.”<sup>12</sup>

The creation of the most important African American school in Selma followed the Reformed Presbyterians’ creation of Knox Academy. In 1874 the state black Baptist convention approved the development of a separate black Baptist theological seminary. In 1877, the convention chose Selma as the school site and in the following year, 1878, the seminary began operations in a rented house (extant) before moving to a basement room in the First Colored Baptist Church (that building is not extant). The convention in March 1878 approved \$3000 for the purchase of old county fairgrounds in the northwest section of town. Here grew the campus of what became known as Selma University, supported by the state convention and, beginning in 1880, also by the American Baptist Home Missionary Society. The legislature incorporated the school as Selma Baptist Normal and Theological School in 1881. After controversies over debt and management, the convention reconfirmed Selma as the home for the seminary in 1887 and it has remained in that location ever since.

The density of and significance of these Selma schools likely led to the founding of Alabama State Teacher’s Association in the city in 1882. Rev. George M. Elliot of Knox Academy and R. B. Hudson principal of the Clark School, were among the founders of the association. Elliot served as its second president, Hudson as its fifth.

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<sup>10</sup> Silsby as cited in Richard Bailey, *Neither Carpetbaggers Nor Scalawags: Black Officeholders During Reconstruction in Alabama, 1867-1878* (Montgomery: New South Books, 2010), 119.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>12</sup> J.W. Sproull and D.B. Willson, eds., *The Reformed Presbyterian and Covenanter* (Pittsburgh: Myers, Shinkle & Co., 1886-87), 114.

In 1889, the Methodists too created their school, Payne University (not extant, the historic location is the site of Payne Elementary School), sponsored by the Alabama AME churches. It began with 188 students at Brown Chapel AME Church and later served over 400 students by the early twentieth century. Rev. W. H. Mixon, a native of Dallas County who also attended Selma University, is credited for building the school as a key Methodist institution. The school stood in the 1500 block of Franklin Street. A 1917 report on AME colleges recognized Payne as one of the largest and most important within the denomination. It had 265 students, with 13 teachers, and a campus valued at \$35,000.<sup>13</sup> Selma University, Knox Academy and Payne University helped to create a vibrant African American middle class in Selma, most of which lived in the northwest neighborhood between the two colleges.

The two colleges came before the creation of a new public school for African Americans in 1890. But in 1891 the Alabama state legislature approved new education laws that allowed for discrimination in facilities and in the salaries provided for black teachers compared to whites. Despite these impediments, Richard B. Hudson (1866-1931), who was a Selma University graduate, remained committed to building a public school presence for black children in Selma. In 1890 Clark Elementary School opened on the first floor of Sylvan Street Hall, the first public school for African-American students in Selma. A permanent building was constructed and opened in 1894 on Lawrence Street. Hudson administered Clark School for approximately 40 years and coped with a white perception that black children did not need education when they were needed more in the cotton fields or in the cotton industry. The length of the school year for blacks in Alabama, for instance, decreased from 100 days in 1900 to a mere 76 days by 1910.<sup>14</sup>

### Cemeteries

Establishing African American cemeteries occurred as Jim Crow segregation took hold of all aspects of Selma's landscape by the end of the century. Before the Civil War, Selma had two public cemeteries. The first was established in 1833 as the West Selma Grave yard (later Magnolia Cemetery then Old Live Oak Cemetery) on the western edge of town. The second was originally called the East Selma Grave Yard (later Elmwood Cemetery) that the town established c. 1856.

Initially neither cemetery was segregated. For instance, the first blacks were buried in Elmwood Cemetery c. 1860 but in 1864, town officials buried Confederate soldiers there and in 1865 Selma Jews purchased a new section on the north border of Elmwood Cemetery, with a narrow lane dividing the Jewish cemetery from the black cemetery. The same mixed pattern was true for the West Selma Grave Yard (then known as Magnolia Cemetery). Blacks were buried there; indeed, Benjamin Turner, who was the state's first elected African American member of the U.S. Congress (1871), was buried there in 1894.

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<sup>13</sup> Kelly Miller and Joseph R. Gay, *Progress and Achievements of the Colored People* (Washington D.C.: Austin N. Jenkins, 1917)

<sup>14</sup> Fitts, 92-93.

But as white dominance over local affairs took control of Selma in the mid-1870s, the role of the two public cemeteries also began to change. The most significant alterations came at the West Selma/Magnolia cemetery property. In 1877-78, the town bought land adjacent to the west side of the cemetery and local citizens erected a large Confederate memorial in the middle of the new section. With the support and assistance of the Ladies Memorial Association, former Confederate Colonel and postwar Selma leader N.R.H. Dawson purchased and installed live oak trees in both the new and old sections of the cemetery and made other improvements in landscaping, driveways, and walls. The town renamed the cemetery Live Oak Cemetery, recognizing the “old” and “new” sections accordingly.

Comparatively Elmwood Cemetery on Race Street became a forgotten civic space. The earlier Confederate burials were removed c. 1878. By the turn-of-the-century it was the town’s recognized African American cemetery and became the final resting place for many significant local leaders in commerce, religion, and education from the first half of the twentieth century.

## **II. Strengthening African American Bonds of Community in a Jim Crow era, 1900-1940**

In 1900 Alabama white citizens took steps to institutionalize Jim Crow segregation as the law of the land. Although the Alabama legislature had been passing laws since the end of the Civil War ensuring that African Americans would never achieve equal status with whites, by 1900 it was clear that these laws alone were not having their desired effect. Gerrymandering, changing local government positions from elected to appointed ones, among other political maneuvers, helped Democrats retain political control; however, before the 1901 Constitution significant numbers of African American voters still existed on Alabama voting rolls.

In 1900 state voters approved the creation of a constitutional convention. The majority (144) of the 155 delegates selected to the convention were Democrats. No African Americans or women were part of the convention. John Knox was elected president of the convention. Historian Wane Flynt quotes Knox’s presidential address as an indication of the entire affair: “And what is it we want to do? Why it is within the limits imposed by the Federal Constitution, to establish white supremacy in this state. This is our problem, and we should be permitted to deal with it, unobstructed by outside influences.”<sup>15</sup> That attitude, simply stated, framed the white response to the civil rights movement for the next six decades. The vote to ratify the Constitution was close in all counties, with the exception of Dallas, Hale, and Wilcox Counties, where an overwhelming majority voted in favor of ratification, a sign of a fixed vote Flynt concluded. The combination of a significant number of African American registered voters and the extra time it took for the three counties to report their votes, made Flynt suspicious that an election was even held in those counties.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Wayne Flynt, *Alabama in the Twentieth Century* (Tuscaloosa: University Press of Alabama, 2006), 7.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

Prior to the constitutional convention on May 20, 1901, several prominent black Alabama residents met in Montgomery to write an appeal to the delegation. Selma resident and educator R. B. Hudson served as secretary for the meeting. Charles O. Boothe, a prominent Baptist minister (Dexter Avenue Baptist Church) and supporter of Selma University, was also present.<sup>17</sup> Booker T. Washington of Tuskegee Institute wrote most of the final draft of the appeal, which emphasized that African Americans were productive citizens, involved in building projects, becoming home and business owners, and defending the nation. The letter ends with an appeal to keep white and black citizens equal under the law: "Any law which will merely change the name and form of fraud, or can be interpreted as meaning one thing when applied to one race and something else when applied to another race, will not in our opinion improve our present condition, but may unsettle the peace and thrift of our people and decrease the wealth and prosperity of Alabama."<sup>18</sup>

The African American appeal had little effect on the constitutional convention's outcome. The 1901 Alabama Constitution institutionalized white supremacy through creating a legal infrastructure for Jim Crow segregation. The new constitution disenfranchised African American voters, mandated that black and white students be educated separately, and declared miscegenation illegal. Article VIII of the new constitution set parameters for voting registration that almost completely eliminated the African American vote. In 1900 in Alabama there were 181, 471 black registered voters, after the 1901 Constitution was ratified, the number dropped to 3,654. In Dallas County, in 1900 there were 9,871 registered black voters, after the ratification of the new constitution, the number dropped to 152, where it roughly stayed for the next six decades.<sup>19</sup> The registration requirements included a poll tax for all male citizens 18-45, the ability to read and write an article of the constitution or be a property owner of at least 40 acres taxed at \$300 or more. These barriers to voter registration should have prevented a large number of whites from voting as well, however, a "fighting grandfather clause" which allowed men whose ancestors fought in any war waged by the United States to register the first year the constitution was in effect kept thousands of whites on the rolls. In addition, an unequal application of the literacy requirement ensured there would be many more white than black voters. Flynt further noted that several other provisions placed limits on local self-government and ability to levy taxes, which, in turn, impeded the development of infrastructure in many Alabama cities, but affected African American communities more than white communities.<sup>20</sup>

Jim Crow Selma was oppressive for its African American residents. Attorney J. J. Chesnut , Jr., who was born in 1930, observed:

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<sup>17</sup> Fitts, 99.

<sup>18</sup> "To the Members of the Alabama Constitutional Convention," Alabama Secretary of State Constitutional Convention Proceedings, SG17778, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, Alabama.

<sup>19</sup> Fitts, 101.

<sup>20</sup> Also see Glenn Feldman, *The Disfranchisement Myth: Poor Whites and Suffrage Restriction in Alabama* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004).

If you were black, the significance of race wasn't something you suddenly discovered. It wasn't even something you had to be told. It was something you just grew up knowing, something most instinctual. Your place was obvious: black people sat up in the 'buzzard roost' at the white movie theaters and the white people sat downstairs. My mother and Aunt Lennie couldn't try on clothes in the department stores or use the restrooms. Only one downtown store, S. H. Kress [extant], had a 'colored' restroom. . . . Black people lived in smaller houses on unpaved, poorly lit streets.<sup>21</sup>

Despite the legalization of a Jim Crow world, the African American middle-class in Selma continued to expand. The turn of the twentieth century was a building period for black institutions, creating community bonds and powerful networks that would later be important organizing ground for the Civil Rights Movement. Significant expansion in the physical facilities and significance for churches, schools, and business in Selma created an institutional infrastructure that helped the community weather the storm of Jim Crow segregation in the first half of the twentieth century, creating space for resistance in the segregated city.

In 1918 Selma was one of the first two cities in Alabama to establish a chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), led by World War I veteran Charles J. Adams. Adams worked for the railroad and later became a notary public, serving then as a de facto attorney for basic legal needs for the town's black residents. Also, in the mid-1920s Adams convinced a small group to help organize the Dallas County Voters League in an attempt to raise the number of registered black voters in the county. In 1928 another professional, Samuel Boynton who arrived from Tuskegee Institute as the African American county extension agent, joined Adams in building civic institutions for civil rights activism outside of the churches. Thornton notes: "during the years before World War II, very few blacks sought to register and of those who did, exceedingly few were successful. This situation prevailed throughout the state, but it was especially true of Black Belt counties like Dallas."<sup>22</sup>

### Schools

The 1901 Constitution enshrined segregation in the public school system in Alabama. Separate schools were already the norm, however, the constitution ensured that it would be almost 70 years before desegregated schools were a reality in Selma. Prior to this, Alabama's 1891 Apportionment Act made it legal to discriminate in the distribution of funds between white and black public schools.

Despite the legal impediments and poor funding, R. B. Hudson was able to expand facilities at Clark School; by 1921 three more buildings had been added to the campus. Clark Elementary School went through grade 8. Until the 1930s, any student wishing to continue their education in Selma had to attend one of several private schools in the

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<sup>21</sup> J. L. Chesnut, Jr., and Julia Cass, *Black in Selma* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1990), 21.

<sup>22</sup> J. Mills Thornton, *Dividing Lines: Municipal Politics and the Struggle for Civil Rights in Montgomery, Birmingham, and Selma* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002), 436.

city. Thus, the three African American private schools, Knox Academy along with Selma University and Payne University, grew significantly in the early twentieth century. Selma University on Lapsley Street, under President Robert T. Pollard, expanded its course offerings, as well as its physical campus. Pollard served two terms as president from 1902-1914 and from 1916-1930. Both Dinkins Memorial Chapel (built 1904, rebuilt 1921 after a fire, renovated 1980) and Foster Hall (built 1910) were added to the campus. In addition under Pollard, electricity was added to all buildings.<sup>23</sup> Pollard also successfully helped Selma University out of debt as he solicited money from the American Baptist Home Missionary Society, Southern Baptist Convention, and the National Baptist Convention's General Education Board to complete Dinkins Chapel and Foster Hall.<sup>24</sup> As historian Winston Fallin concluded, "With renewed faith in the providence and promises of God, they continued to move ahead by expanding their convention, erecting academies, building a greater Selma University, and speaking out on social, economic, educational, and political issues."<sup>25</sup> With the presence of the primary African American Baptist seminary (Selma University) in the town, Selma was a center for black Baptists in Alabama. Several Selma ministers served as officers in the Alabama State Baptist Convention as well as the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc.

The Reformed Presbyterian Church (extant) expanded its education outreach from Knox Academy to East Selma in 1905, where it established East End Academy (also later known as Kingston School). The school also expanded to two other locations outside Selma in Dallas County. Sara J. Duncan, writing about Knox Academy in 1906, notes the expanding curriculum of the academy and the quality of graduates of the school: "Nearly every year graduates leave this school, going out trying to help the world be better. They have recently added industrial departments which is a credit to our city. They have a faculty of about twelve. This denomination also fosters a mission school about three miles in the suburbs."<sup>26</sup>

Higher education opportunities for African Americans in Selma changed in the 1920s as the Lutheran Church launched its own missionary effort. In 1932 the A.M.E. church-sponsored Payne University closed its Franklin Street operations, with three classroom buildings and one dormitory, and eventually moved the college to Birmingham. Replacing it was Alabama Lutheran College (now Concordia College, extant). The school was established in 1922 to train teachers for the black Lutheran academies that the Missouri Lutheran Synod operated throughout the south. Like Selma University, Concordia College successfully transitioned to a college, after secondary education for African American students improved in Selma.

## Churches

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<sup>23</sup> Wilson Fallin, Jr., *Uplifting the People: Three Centuries of Black Baptists in Alabama* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1997), 132.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>26</sup> Sara J. Duncan, *Progressive Mission in the South and Addresses with Illustrations and Sketches of Missionary Workers and Ministers and Bishop's Wives* (Atlanta: The Franklin Printing and Publishing Company, 1906), 149.

The early twentieth century was a time of steady growth for churches. Many churches founded in the late nineteenth century saw their membership grow and new buildings were erected to accommodate the burgeoning congregations. Between 1900 and 1930 there was a steady increase in the African American population in Selma from approximately 4,500 to approximately 9,000 people.<sup>27</sup> The biggest increase was between 1900 and 1910, when the black population in Selma increased from approximately 4,500 to approximately 7,800 people. Sara J. Duncan in 1905 documented twenty-two black churches in Selma. Missionary Baptist, Primitive Baptist, Reformed Presbyterian, and African Methodist Episcopal churches were among the denominations that dominated Selma along with a growing Pentecostal movement, represented by Lord's Tabernacle Church of Christ Holiness (extant) on Philpot Street. Duncan describes the relationship between the churches as collegial: "When any great work is going on for the cause of humanity all denominations help. They have an interdenominational ministers union. This city is the residential home of ministers, presiding elders, general officers, prominent in all denominations, besides many leading women, prominent in missionary work of the different denominations, both local, state, and national."<sup>28</sup>

Churches clearly played an important role in helping the many newcomers orient themselves to the town. Some funded new architecturally impressive sanctuaries, such as Brown Chapel AME Church (extant, 1908), Tabernacle Baptist Church (extant, 1922), and Green Street Baptist Church (extant, 1922). The new Tabernacle sanctuary, constructed under the guidance of Reverend David V. Jemison, made a powerful statement of African American success and stability at its corner lot facing Broad Street—the only such situated black church in the town. Rev. Jemison became an acknowledged middle-class African American leader in Selma, and across the state, even the nation, due to his prominence within the National Baptist church. Another important congregation west of Broad Street was West Trinity Baptist Church (originally West Selma Baptist Church), which was established in 1895. The church moved locations several times in its early years, but in 1910 the congregation funded a permanent sanctuary, which was enlarged in 1920. In 1921 the congregation hosted the Southwest District Convention of the Alabama Baptist Convention and the Uniontown Association. By 1924, West Trinity had outgrown this building and the congregation purchased the lot at 310 L. L. Anderson Avenue, where the extant church building is located.<sup>29</sup> Ward Chapel AME Church, with Rev. C. J. L. Rumph leading the construction of a new building in 1925, partially filled the gap in AME services left when Payne University closed operations. Standing on Philpot Street nearby the earlier St. Paul CME Church, Ward Chapel became an important Civil Rights center in the 1950s. A fifth congregation, Shiloh Baptist Church, was founded in 1899 at the corner of Range and Water Streets. The church began with only 10 members under the leadership of

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<sup>27</sup> U.S. Census 1900 and 1930

<sup>28</sup> Duncan, 152.

<sup>29</sup> "One Hundred Eighth Church Anniversary – Homecoming of the West Trinity Baptist Church," 2003, copy provided to National Register files, MTSU Center for Historic Preservation.

Reverend Elmore. New membership slowly joined the church increasing its number to 50 and the congregation moved to its present location on Mechanic Street.<sup>30</sup>

Mt. Zion Primitive Baptist Church was established in 1898 and met first in a frame building on Union Street, just a couple of hundred yards from the railroad tracks in the northwest section of the town. The Primitive Baptist movement grew significantly in the next three decades. By 1912 the congregation built a brick Victorian-styled sanctuary on its Union Street property. The Primitive Church National Convention and the Women's Auxiliary for the Primitive Baptist Women's Department have met at the church. In 1933 two new Primitive Baptist Churches were formed from Mt. Zion, Little Canaan Primitive Baptist Church (extant in northeast section) and Union Grove Primitive Baptist Church (now located in the town's suburbs).

Like the First Baptist Church of 1894, these new landmark buildings expressed African American achievement, pride, and identity. In a Jim Crow system, African Americans could expect little if any assistance from public agencies. As such the churches grew as secular safe havens for political gatherings and other civil rights meetings.

### Business and Professions

The early twentieth century also witnessed an expansion in the number of African American businessmen and professionals in Selma as the Jim Crow codes created niche opportunities for blacks to provide services to their own people. Business growth, however, was difficult, due to the number of impediments that unsupportive whites could impose. The Selma branch of the Alabama Penny Savings Bank (not extant) was indicative of the growing wealth and savings in the community. The bank originated in Birmingham in 1890 and opened a branch in Selma in 1911. Henry Boyd, a leader at Tabernacle Baptist Church, was vice-president of the Selma branch. In 1915, the bank failed after the boll weevil caused a significant decline in cotton crops and precipitated a general economic downturn. Many middle-class families lost their savings as a result of the bank failure.

Several black businessmen in Selma weathered the bank's difficulties. John Henry Williams started the J. H. Williams and Sons funeral home in 1905. Now located on Minter Avenue, the funeral home (extant) is now the oldest black business in Selma. Calvin Osborn (1847-1925) ran the Interlink Cotton Gin Company, one of the handful of cotton gins that were owned and operated by African Americans in Alabama at the time.<sup>31</sup> Horace B. Sullivan, an undertaker, and his son H. Stanley Sullivan, a dentist, invested in the construction of the Sullivan Building (extant) on the corner of Franklin Street and Alabama Avenue in downtown Selma. This brick building soon anchored other African American professionals. By mid-century the building was home to insurance agents and Dallas County Voters League leaders Samuel Boynton and his wife Amelia Pitts Boynton.

<sup>30</sup> "Shiloh Baptist Church History" 1988, photocopy provided to MTSU Center for Historic Preservation.

<sup>31</sup> Charles E. Cobb Jr., *On the Road to Freedom: A Guided Tour of the Civil Rights Trail* (Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 2008), 227.

Segregation also meant separate healthcare facilities for white and black citizens. Although some white hospitals would accept black patients on a limited basis, few would allow black physicians privileges to practice there. The black hospital movement, beginning in the late nineteenth century, was a strategy to rectify the unequal healthcare that African Americans received. Most hospitals established in this time were small, privately owned and received at least some support from churches or philanthropic organizations.<sup>32</sup> Two such facilities operated in Selma. In 1907 Dr. Lincoln L. Burwell (1867-1928) opened the Burwell Infirmary (extant) on Philpot Avenue. Burwell was a graduate of Selma University and then attended Leonard Medical College in Raleigh, North Carolina, graduating in 1889. He first started a medical practice in Selma, and then expanded his work to the Burwell Infirmary. He also opened a drugstore on Franklin Avenue after having difficulty getting treatments from white pharmacies. Reid Drug Store also operated in Selma on Broad Street. Curry W. Reid (1871-1947) who founded the store previously worked for Dr. Burwell. When Burwell died in 1928, Minnie and Marius J. Anderson, his daughter and son-in-law took, over the operation of the infirmary.<sup>33</sup>

A second black hospital was established in 1922 when the Alabama Baptist Convention opened two hospitals in Selma, the Alabama Baptist Hospital received white patients, while Good Samaritan Hospital (original building is not extant; a 1964 building is extant) received black patients. H. Stanley Sullivan's old house on Voeglin Avenue served as the site of the hospital. Mamie Norris, a nurse who graduated from the Tuskegee Institute, served as hospital administrator. In 1937 Catholic Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester and Edmundite Missions began operating the hospital.<sup>34</sup>

### The Depression and the formation of the Dallas County Voters League

The Great Depression significantly impacted the African American community. The economic disaster added to the struggles of the religious supported schools in Selma. The AME church closed all operations at Payne Institute in 1932. The Reformed Presbyterian Church announced in 1935 that it could no longer support either Knox Academy or East End Academy (also known as Little Knox). All three of these schools were taken over by the Selma City School district, relieving some of the crowding at the Clark School. Payne Institute and East End were transformed into public elementary schools and Knox Academy extended classes through the 9th grade. Outside of high school courses of study offered at Selma University and Alabama Lutheran College there were no public high school opportunities available for Selma black students.<sup>35</sup>

In 1936, partially in reaction to the possible closing of Knox Academy, Sam Boynton and Charles J. Adams reformed the Dallas County Voters League (DCVL), which first had

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<sup>32</sup> Thomas J. Ward, Jr., "Black Hospital Movement in Alabama" Encyclopedia of Alabama, August 24, 2009.

<sup>33</sup> Fitts, 92, 103; "Selma's Early African American Pioneers" Selma, Alabama: City of Selma Tourism.

<sup>34</sup> Fitts, 118.

<sup>35</sup> Fitts, 119.

organized in the 1920s. Amelia Pitts Boynton, the former home demonstration agent for African Americans in Dallas County, recalled Adams as “truly the most dynamic person Selma had.”<sup>36</sup> When reactivated in the 1930s, DCVL held voter education classes to help potential registrants overcome the onerous literacy requirements for registration. Boynton and Adams both worked with the Selma Civic League, an organization concerned with general city improvements for the black community, and the Selma NAACP chapter (it was later banned in Alabama in the 1950s).

Sam Boynton worked to improve the livelihoods of rural African American farmers through the agricultural extension program and was also a community leader in the city of Selma. For example, Boynton arranged for a group of black farmers to purchase sodium nitrate wholesale, after white suppliers of the fertilizer claimed there was a shortage. Although it turned out that the shortage was manufactured as a way to foreclose on independent black farms, Boynton’s leadership helped stave off the worst of abuse by white mortgage holders and landowners.<sup>37</sup>

Charles J. Adams took on a similar role in the Selma community. As a notary public he helped many black veterans apply for federal assistance and was active in the NAACP and the DCVL. Likely because of his advocacy on behalf of the black community, Adams was jailed several times, accused of notarizing false documents.<sup>38</sup> But Adams was a recognized “race man” who gave other black middle class residents opportunities otherwise not available. With support from Adams, for instance, the Chesnut brothers opened a grocery and meat business, Chesnut Brothers Market and Grocery (extant), at Minter Avenue and Mabry Street in 1936.

According to Amelia Pitts Boynton, some white Selma leaders discouraged New Deal projects or other government programs in Selma, not wanting federal programs or officials to upset local race relations. Although the assistance would improve overall conditions in Selma, there was a resistance to any programs that would also improve the lives of black citizens.<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, Selma benefitted from several New Deal projects. For instance, Selma City Hall (extant, now the Cecil C. Jackson Jr. Public Safety building) was a Public Works Administration project in Classical Revival style.

Next door is another New Deal building with a very different story. Samuel Boynton, Charles J. Adams and others successfully lobbied the federal government for some New Deal money to be used to build a community center in Selma. Boynton had advocated for years for a public restroom facility for African Americans near downtown Selma. Jim Crow laws prevented African Americans from using any of the store facilities including restrooms, lunch counters, and other amenities. Boynton and Adams saw a need for a place for African Americans to use the bathroom and rest, especially for people who traveled from outer Dallas County and surrounding counties to shop in Selma. White Selma leaders did not take the African American proposal seriously. It

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<sup>36</sup> Amelia Pitts Boynton Robinson, *Bridge Across Jordan* (Washington, D.C.: Schiller, 1991), 136.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>38</sup> Chestnut and Cass, 1.

<sup>39</sup> Robinson 79.

was not until a white minister, Dr. E. W. Gamble of St. Paul's Episcopal Church (extant) took on the cause, that the project gained traction with the white leaders in Selma. At the same time, Boynton traveled to Washington, D.C. and won Selma a \$40,000 grant from the Works Progress Administration for construction of the building. The city of Selma donated the land on Franklin Street between Alabama Avenue and Water Street, across the street from the Sullivan Building, a key African American commercial and professional landmark in the downtown business district. The Colored Community Center, now called the George Wilson Building (extant), housed restrooms, an auditorium, and office space for agricultural extension workers. The second floor of the building featured murals painted by Felix Gaines.<sup>40</sup> The building was finished in 1937. Amelia Pitts Boynton observed: "it was once the pride of south-central Alabama, where all of the big bands like Duke Ellington, Earl Hines, Nat King Cole, Fats Domino and others came to play for the black servicemen from Craig Air Force Base."<sup>41</sup> The building, thus, became a cultural intersection between outsiders, Selma residents, and the black military.

Local officials did not, or could not, stop the construction of the black community building. But otherwise, white officials took new steps to suppress outward expressions of black community building. Amelia Pitts Boynton documented the end to community sings that were organized annually at Bloch Park, a baseball stadium in Selma. The event was an important event for the community, but in 1937, white Selma leaders forced the organizers to cancel the event, citing concerns for the safety of African Americans traveling to the event. Amelia Pitts Boynton argued that the real issue was that white leaders wanted to eliminate the mass gathering of African Americans.<sup>42</sup>

Very few recreational opportunities existed for African Americans in Selma and Dallas County. Sam Boynton wanted the city of Selma to build parks, a swimming pool, or other recreational spaces for African Americans, but was unsuccessful. Instead Boynton organized a group to buy a piece of land in Dallas County called Joyland for a campsite for 4-H club activities and for general community gatherings.<sup>43</sup>

The reactivation of the Dallas County Voters League, which Boynton and his colleagues operated across the street from the new black Community Center, created new impetus for organizing for civil rights. It closed an era, 1900-1940, where key African American institutions matured, both in physical terms but also in their prestige and leadership in the black community, despite the real limits of Jim Crow segregation. This institutional expansion laid a physical foundation for later organizing and action for voting rights: when the mid-century civil rights activists met at Brown Chapel AME Church or Tabernacle Baptist Church they did so in an early 20<sup>th</sup> century building. The Edmundite brothers and St. Joseph sisters, who were the first whites in town to really embrace the notion of African American equality, arrived and started their missions in the late 1930s;

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<sup>40</sup> Robinson, 110 and 141-142; Fitts, 121.

<sup>41</sup> Robinson, 143.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 138-139.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

the first five sisters arrived in 1940.<sup>44</sup> Certainly, the new efforts and institutions did little to increase the number of registered voters in the county, but the beginnings of organized resistance—the NAACP chapter, the DCVL-- to white supremacy can be found during this period.

### III. Civil Rights in a Cold War Era, 1940-1954

At the urging of state and local officials, the United States military in 1940 acquired a large swath of land four miles east of Selma and established Craig Army Air Base (extant) to train fighter pilots.<sup>45</sup> The first airmen arrived August 5, 1940 and set to work building the nation's largest single flying field.<sup>46</sup> Prior to the military base, Selma's economy focused on agriculture and the dependent railroads that transported agricultural goods. Selma's white establishment celebrated the new base as a key step of diversifying the town's economic base.

During World War II, base operations increased to serve the needs of the mobilized United States Air Force. By 1942 the base employed 2,000 military personnel and 1,400 civilians, which provided an economic boon to the town of Selma.<sup>47</sup> The Craig base contributed to the increased urbanization of Selma, which the white establishment welcomed, but it also proved pivotal to later African-American community civil rights efforts by uniting previously disparate households, an outcome that the whites did not forecast.<sup>48</sup>

Desegregation of the United States armed forces after the war impacted race relations in Selma (and the rest of the South as well). J. Mills Thornton observed: "the relative lack of racial barriers at Craig was a new experience for many Selmians, white and black."<sup>49</sup> In some cases, Selma law enforcement had to answer to officers from Craig for their actions against African-American military personnel.<sup>50</sup> Generally, such confrontations resulted from alleged drunken altercations in the city of Selma between local citizens and cadets. This federal intervention in local law enforcement rubbed the town's white leadership in the wrong way. Then, there were Selma's own returning World War II veterans—the strictness of Selma's segregated society presented a stark contrast to their experience in the military.<sup>51</sup> J. L. Chesnut, Jr., recalled: "the veterans were more willing than my father and other men in his generation to complain openly about the police and other white people."<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Amy L. Koehlinger, *The New Nuns: Racial Justice and Religious Reform in the 1960s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 149.

<sup>45</sup> Thornton, 420.

<sup>46</sup> Carl C. Morgan, "Craig Air Force Base: Its Effect on Selma 1940-1977," *The Alabama Review* 42 (April 1989): 88.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>48</sup> Due to economic pressures, the United States government closed the base in 1977.

<sup>49</sup> Thornton, 420.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 420.

<sup>51</sup> Glenn Feldman, *Politics, Society, and the Klan in Alabama, 1915-1949* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1999), 287.

<sup>52</sup> Chesnut and Cass, 37.

After serving their country African Americans asserted that they had earned full citizenship, especially equal access to suffrage. In addition, African American soldiers from outside of the segregated South detested that they suddenly had to adjust their behaviors to local expectations while many white soldiers were uncomfortable with the level of intolerance exhibited throughout the region.

The presence of the base also contributed to the continued growth of an African American commercial and entertainment district on Broad Street, along the blocks between Tabernacle Baptist Church and Jefferson Davis Avenue, the latter being a traditional dividing line between whites and blacks in Selma. In the 1940s, local black residents called this area “the Drag.” As attorney J. L. Chesnut admitted “objectively, the Drag didn’t amount to very much” but as a teenager “it was kind of Harlem, an oasis in oppressive little Selma, with jazz, entertainment, drinking, gambling, chocolate-brown women teasing, and sharply dressed men strutting in zoot suits, narrow pointed shoes, and Big Apple hats.”<sup>53</sup>

Selma white leaders in the 1940s also understood (but did not particularly accept) an emerging new body of federal case law addressing civil rights. The U.S. Supreme Court, for example, struck down “white only” political primaries in *Smith v. Allwright* (1944). In theory this decision allowed for increased registration and political participation of previously disenfranchised African Americans. Concerned at the loss of hegemony, segregationists refocused their efforts on the registration process. The Boswell Amendment to the Alabama Constitution, introduced by Geneva County representative Elmo C. “Bud” Boswell in 1945, provided registrars the power to deny a citizen registration if they could not satisfactorily “understand and explain” any section of the U.S. Constitution. It was used effectively to slightly increase the number of African American voters to where the test of *Allwright* was met without giving any meaningful political power to the local black community.<sup>54</sup> The white registrar then became “a law unto himself in determining the citizen’s possession of literacy, understanding, and other qualifications.”<sup>55</sup> Eventually in 1949, a panel of three U.S. District Court judges struck down the amendment as unconstitutional. By this time, however, restricted registration was in practice throughout the state to the detriment of African American citizens.

A new generation of white missionaries—Catholic clergy and sisters--became a more active player in creating social services and new civic spaces for African Americans during the war period. In 1941 the Fathers of St. Edmund, a Catholic order that had arrived in 1937, worked with the Sisters of St. Joseph to open a church school for African American youth, St. Elizabeth’s School (the school building from c. 1960 is extant), where they added a grade a year until 1948. In 1943 the Sisters of St. Joseph in collaboration with the Edmundite fathers established a nursing home for elderly African Americans. Most importantly the Edmundites purchased the inadequate Good

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<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>54</sup> Scotty E. Kirkland, “Boswell Amendment,” Encyclopedia of Alabama website (accessed June 2, 2011).

<sup>55</sup> David J. Garrow, *Protest at Selma: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Voting Rights Act of 1965* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1978), 8.

Samaritan Hospital from the Baptists in 1944 and opened a new facility in 1947 (later replaced with a modern hospital in 1964). In 1947, the fathers established the Don Bosco Club for black youth, a Catholic version of the boys club phenomenon.<sup>56</sup> One sister recalled: “We had very, very little to do with any white people because we lived among black people, and white people didn’t like it.”<sup>57</sup>

In reaction to federal court rulings and new state laws, the Selma school board began to expand the high school program for African American students, adding a tenth grade in 1945, eleventh grade in 1946, and twelfth grade in 1947. Then in 1949 the city opened a modern brick high school for blacks, named in honor of Richard B. Hudson, at the edge of town then, where Lapsley Avenue became Summerfield Road and intersected with First Avenue. From that point until integration in 1970, Hudson High (extant) became a key community center for Selma’s blacks. Kindergarten programs were also underway at local churches; the Green Street Baptist Church, for instance, established its kindergarten in 1946, continuing its program for the next fourteen years.<sup>58</sup>

This pattern of new and renewed institutions continued in the early 1950s. With \$3000 from the Daniel Payne College trustees, Ward Chapel AME remodeled its existing church with brick exterior and modern amenities in 1949. The Edmundites again joined resources with the Sisters of St. Joseph in 1950 to establish the first Catholic school in Alabama to train African-American nurses,<sup>59</sup> adding to its earlier commitment of the Good Samaritan Hospital. Warnings from the KKK were posted on their buildings; but the fathers and sisters continued with their work.<sup>60</sup>

In 1951 white officials announced plans to finally build a branch library for African American patrons. Protestant churches responded in kind. Reverend Claude C. Brown, who had become minister of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in 1942, worked with the local community to establish first the Ralph Bunche Club, which met in the basement of the Reformed Presbyterian Church (extant), which later evolved into the African American section of the local YMCA.<sup>61</sup> Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth, who had studied at Selma University, returned to the city in 1952 to serve as minister at First Baptist Church. Rev. Shuttlesworth resigned in December and soon became minister at Bethel Baptist Church in Birmingham in 1953 but never forgot his Selma beginnings and returned there in 1965 during the SCLC and SNCC campaign for voter rights.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Koehlinger, 149-50; Thornton, 418-419.

<sup>57</sup> Koehlinger, 150.

<sup>58</sup> “Green Street Missionary Baptist Church History, 1881-2012,” photocopy provided by the church, National Register files, MTSU Center for Historic Preservation.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 419.

<sup>60</sup> Koehlinger, 156.

<sup>61</sup> The Young Men’s Christian Association, “Claude C. Brown Branch History,” [www.ymcaofselma.org](http://www.ymcaofselma.org) (accessed January 5, 2013). Through the financial assistance of The Women’s League of the Church Street Methodist Church, The Community Chest, Saint Paul’s Episcopal Church, and individual gifts, the Boy’s Club grew to become the George Washington Carver Branch of the YMCA for Negroes (extant, at 802 First Avenue), established with this new name in 1956.

<sup>62</sup> Andrew Manis, “Fred Lee Shuttlesworth,” *Encyclopedia of Alabama* online, accessed February 2013.

Another sign of progress to Selma's blacks was the city's 1952 decision to accept the federal funding for George Washington Carver Homes (extant) on present-day Martin Luther King, Jr., Boulevard between the landmark Brown Chapel AME Church and the First Baptist Church. The new housing project, however, displaced a historic neighborhood that nurtured both of these vital civil rights institutions. Historian J. Mills Thornton has emphasized the significance of these new institutions that at first glance today seem so relatively minor:

The opening of public secondary education to black students, the three new black public schools, the new black hospital, nursing home, and school for practical nurses, the black YMCA branch, and other new institutions such as the extensive George Washington Carver public housing project . . . were visible evidence of the less tangible but much more important metamorphosis taking place below the surface of daily life in Dallas County.<sup>63</sup>

Thornton adds: "these institutions had enormous importance for black Selmians, who could see in them reason to have confidence that blacks' subordination need not be perpetual. They did not indicate, of course, that any great transformation was at hand, but they did seem to prove that things were beginning to change."<sup>64</sup>

Another way of measuring a new confidence in the future were changes at many Selma African American churches, where congregations either built new or updated older buildings, in every case adding rooms that could be used for community gatherings. At West Trinity Baptist Church (extant), Rev. I. C. Ravizee, who became minister in 1947, led the congregation in raising funds for a new church building with an educational annex and construction began in July 1952. Rev. Claude C. Brown of the Reformed Presbyterian Church spoke at the church as the building project began. Alonzo Darrow was the chairman of the building committee; C. R. Smyley was the architect. Nine months later the project was finished—and a new brick landmark church served as yet another community anchor in northwest Selma.<sup>65</sup> At the Mt. Zion Primitive Baptist Church, Rev. B. F. McDole, who became pastor in 1950, led the congregation in installing a baptism pool and constructing a new addition to the rear of the church for classrooms and community gatherings.<sup>66</sup> Rev. J. E. Noble became pastor at Shiloh Baptist Church in 1954 and over the next seven years he led the congregation in making changes to the sanctuary's exterior and developed a large building fund for future changes.<sup>67</sup> Also in 1954 black Lutherans built the brick Trinity Lutheran Church sanctuary in East Selma. In 1957 Second (Missionary) Baptist Church, which had been organized in November 1869, gained Rev. D. G. Garrett as its pastor, who began the

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<sup>63</sup> Thornton, 419.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> "One Hundred Eight Church Anniversary—Homecoming of the West Trinity Baptist Church," July 27, 2003. Copy of program, National Register files, MTSU Center for Historic Preservation.

<sup>66</sup> "Welcome to the 112<sup>th</sup> Homecoming/Church Anniversary, Mt. Zion Primitive Baptist Church," February 28, 2010, National Register files, MTSU Center for Historic Preservation.

<sup>67</sup> "Shiloh Church History," photocopy shared with Carroll Van West at Shiloh Baptist Church, August 2012.

process of renovating and modernizing the turn of the century frame church building into the imposing brick sanctuary of today.<sup>68</sup>

Little surprise then that the number of registered black voters also inched forward in the early 1950s. In the early 1950s Boynton and two World War II veterans, J.D. Hunter and Ernest Doyle, re-launched a Selma chapter of the NAACP. Occasionally the DCVL also met at local churches for literacy and voucher training, including First Baptist Church. The organization did make progress from January 1952 to May 1954 during which time 74 African Americans registered to vote in Dallas County.

The confidence of the early 1950s, however, was shaken to its core by the Fikes court case in 1954. During the spring months of 1953 (March to May) a series of rapes and attempted rapes by an unidentified African American against white women throughout Dallas County made residents fearful. One of the victims of attempted rape was the daughter of Selma Mayor Chris B. Heinz, Jean Heinz Rockwell. The identity of this victim increased publicity regarding the crime streak. William Earl Fikes was first arrested on May 16, 1953.<sup>69</sup> His trial would prove a watershed moment in Selma history. Fikes was held in isolation at Kilby State Prison, denied visits by his father and lawyer. During the first week of internment Selma City Police Captain Wilson Baker questioned Fikes for hours everyday.<sup>70</sup> Wilson Baker spent the majority of his career on the Selma police force working his way through the ranks. In the 1960s Baker would play a significant role in Selma politics and the Civil Rights movement as Officer of Public Safety.

Two prominent white defense attorneys, Sam Earle Hobbs and Hugh S.D. Mallory, represented Fikes in the criminal term of circuit court. This first trial took place at the Dallas County Courthouse (extant but altered c. 1959) on June 22, 1953.<sup>71</sup> The jurors convicted Fikes of raping the wife of an airman at Craig base and sentenced him to 99 years in prison. Prominent white citizens in the community of Selma found this sentence too lenient so the circuit solicitor James A. Hare quickly charged Fikes with burglary and the attempted rape of Jean Rockwell, Heinz' daughter.<sup>72</sup> Boynton and others went to local African-American churches to raise funds for Fikes' defense.<sup>73</sup> According to attorney J. L. Chestnut, Jr., this was one of the first times in Selma history that African Americans rallied publicly for a victim of racial discrimination and persecution.<sup>74</sup> The NAACP Legal Defense Fund joined in the second trial by providing attorneys from Birmingham, Peter A. Hall and Orzell Billingsley, Jr., the first African-American lawyers to practice in Dallas County.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> "Souvenir Program of the Centennial Celebration, Second Baptist Church, Selma, Alabama," 1969, copy shared with Carroll Van West at Second Baptist Church, September 2012.

<sup>69</sup> Thornton, 387.

<sup>70</sup> William Earl Fikes Petitioner v State of Alabama (1953), accessed December 2, 2012.

<sup>71</sup> Gay Talese, *A Writer's Life* (New York: Knopf, 2006), 130.

<sup>72</sup> Thornton, 386.

<sup>73</sup> Talese, 130.

<sup>74</sup> Chestnut and Cass, 73.

<sup>75</sup> Thornton, 388.

The testimony of prominent black Selma residents such as S. William Boynton in the second trial further struck extremist whites as a challenge to authority. Historian J. Mills Thornton III concluded, “Hall and Billingsley’s NAACP sponsorship, their aggressive conduct toward white authority, and their attacks on the patterns of white supremacy had caused white Selma to close ranks.”<sup>76</sup> Hall and Billingsley objected to the juror roll charging that registrars excluded blacks. Once additions were made to the juror pool of both races, Judge Walton E. Callen decreed the issue settled, a ruling that only added to the frustration of the NAACP.

The second trial, also held at the Dallas County Courthouse, ended with a guilty verdict but with a different sentence: the jury sentenced Fikes to death.<sup>77</sup> Appeals would keep the suit in courts from 1953 to 1957. Ultimately, despite the inappropriate questioning and incarceration tactics, the Alabama Supreme Court upheld the second Selma verdict and death sentence in January 1955.<sup>78</sup> The United States Supreme Court, however, refused to confirm the verdict on appeal. The Court ruled on January 14, 1957 that “failure to take defendant before a magistrate as required by Alabama statute, and his incarceration in isolation for a week of questioning, confessions thus obtained were not voluntary and their use was a denial of due process, notwithstanding absence of physical brutality and long continued interrogation.”<sup>79</sup> Fikes remained in jail, however, until 1975 as he served the sentence from the first trial.

Combined with the Supreme Court rulings in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954, 1955), the Fikes case galvanized African Americans as few events had since Reconstruction. J. L. Chesnut, Jr., observed: “Folk brought their children to the courtroom to see black men who weren’t bowing or Uncle Tom-ing in the presence of important white people. Boynton got maybe a hundred new NAACP members.”<sup>80</sup> Historian J. Mills Thornton agreed:

It would be difficult to overestimate the importance of the Fikes trials for the future history of Selma. Among the town’s blacks, the example of black attorneys’ and local leaders’ battling on approximately equal terms with white officials, without fear or subservience, was liberating for many observers. And the modest victories the attorneys achieved—the revision of the jury rolls and the reversal of the conviction—formed a significant object lesson that not all power in America was allied with the city and the county, a notion new to most Black Belt blacks. Among white segregationists, this demonstration of the limits of their authority was equally novel. And even more frightening was the evidence provided that blacks, even in Selma, were becoming less resigned to their lot.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 389.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> William Earl Fikes Petitioner v State of Alabama number 53.

<sup>79</sup> United States Supreme Court Decision re: “William Earl FIKES, Petitioner, v. STATE OF ALABAMA” Legal Information Institute <http://www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/352/191> (accessed January 5, 2013).

<sup>80</sup> Chesnut and Cass, 78.

<sup>81</sup> Thornton, 391.

Thornton also emphasized another key point—the trial’s outcome was intensely personal for Selma Mayor Chris Heinz, who from that point on detested the NAACP and other local black activists for what he perceived as an overly aggressive defense of the alleged assailant of his daughter. Can it really be surprising, Thornton asks, that Heinz would link his city government so tightly to the White Citizens Council chapter in Selma, “an alliance so intimate that it was often hard to tell the two organizations apart.” That alliance, Thornton maintains, “appears to have been the principal source of Dallas County whites’ unusually aggressive and unanimous commitment to an extremist racial position during the coming decade.”<sup>82</sup>

#### **IV. Massive Resistance in Wake of Brown v. Board of Education, 1954-1962**

Historian J. Mills Thornton once concluded: “In any ranking of Alabama’s cities in the 1950s and 1960s, Selma would very likely have emerged as its single most inflexibly and fervently segregationist.”<sup>83</sup> Following the establishment of White Citizen’s Councils (WCC) in Mississippi, Dallas County was the first in Alabama, in 1954, to establish a chapter of the organization dedicated to upholding segregation through just about any possible means including economic pressure, blacklists, and boycotts. In November 1954 the Dallas County Citizens’ Council, with Selma attorney H. Alston Keith as chair, held its first public meeting: membership boomed from the first 200 to 600 to 1,500 within a year—almost ¼ of the adult white males in the county.<sup>84</sup> Alston Keith also established the Central Alabama Council uniting WCC chapters in nine counties. Alabama chapters were strongest in the mid-state area where the African-American population rivaled or surpassed the white population and black nonviolent resistant efforts persisted.<sup>85</sup> “Although the councils employed extreme rhetoric to galvanize public sentiment and attract members,” emphasizes historian David Goldfield, “they disclaimed extremism but by openly advocating defiance of the law, they set a precedent for lawlessness. Despite their protests to the contrary, their work and words encouraged violent elements to carry council objectives to their logical conclusion.”<sup>86</sup> Such would prove to be the case in Selma. Whites so flooded the council’s ranks that several mass meetings took place at Memorial Stadium (108 West Dallas Avenue; extant) on the west end of town.

In the wake of *Brown v. Board of Education II* (1955), the NAACP encouraged local parents to petition their school boards for integration. In Selma, prior to the fall term of 1955, 29 parents signed such a petition. Within nine days of the petition’s receipt, and at the urging of the Citizen’s Council, local employers dismissed 16 of the 29 petitioners

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 392.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 380.

<sup>84</sup> Neil R. McMillen, *The Citizens’ Council; Organized Resistance to the Second Reconstruction, 1954-64* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971), 43.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>86</sup> David R. Goldfield, *Black, White, and Southern: Race Relations and Southern Culture 1940 to the Present* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 83.

from their jobs.<sup>87</sup> Five additional petitioners then withdrew their applications. The Selma WCC chapter was pleased that this first use of economic intimidation proved so effective. Joseph Holmes, one of the fired petitioners, worked for Cloverleaf Dairy (not extant). Cloverleaf was the only employer involved in the firings that sold its product to both races. Selma African Americans successfully boycotted Cloverleaf products which led to an increase in sales for competing dairy products in black-owned groceries like that of John U. Smitherman's Fancy Meats & Groceries (1323 Church Street<sup>88</sup>; no longer extant). As a result, the sales representative of the competing dairy, a white female, attempted to contact Smitherman. Busy with customers, Smitherman passed her his personal phone number. This act spurred the animosity of both the Citizen's Council and local police. Threatening phone calls and drive-by shootings terrorized the Smitherman home (1628 Church Street, extant). One group of thugs kidnapped John Sturdivant, who they mistook for Smitherman. The intimidation did not work—Smitherman stayed. A white policeman then tried to burn Smitherman's home, but instead fired a neighbor's home, that of Vera Jones. Undeterred the policeman returned the next night and fired two shots in the Smitherman home, and one bullet grazed the forehead of Helena Smitherman. City officials now reacted, arresting the kidnappers, the policeman, and his accomplice. The policeman committed suicide; a local grand jury refused to return true bills against the others. Ultimately, the Citizen Council's scare tactics successfully drove the Smitherman family, Holmes, and Vera Jones out of Selma.<sup>89</sup>

What happened to Smitherman only began a pattern of intimidation that reached into every corner of Selma and Dallas County, especially after the events in nearby Montgomery during the bus boycott there from 1955-56. African Americans who showed any tendency toward civil rights activism could expect dismissal from their jobs; the professional and business class encountered impediments to credit, any government licenses or reviews, and insurance. Any African American who tried to register to vote was blacklisted. The Selma WCC also effectively turned the town's financial institutions such as Selma Trust and Savings Bank, Selma National Bank, and City National Bank (especially until 1959-60 when the banks moderated their stance), into tools of economic intimidation.<sup>90</sup> As Elizabeth Geyer reported in the pages of *The Crisis*, one Selma member of the White Citizens Council had promised: "We intend to make it difficult, if not impossible, for any Negro who advocates desegregation to find and hold a job, get credit, or renew a mortgage. We'll force the troublemakers out."<sup>91</sup>

Despite the reality of white retaliation, African American residents continued to call for civil rights. In 1955 S. W. and Amelia Boynton testified before a Senate subcommittee in Washington, D.C. regarding African-American suffrage, testimony that contributed to the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1957.<sup>92</sup> The Boyntons then found their business

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<sup>87</sup> Thornton, 394.

<sup>88</sup> Selma Alabama City Directory 1955 (Charleston, SC: Nelson's Directory Co., Inc., 1955).

<sup>89</sup> Thornton, 396.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 399.

<sup>91</sup> Elizabeth Geyer, "The 'New' Ku Klux Klan," *The Crisis*, 63 (March 1956): 139.

<sup>92</sup> Robinson, 112.

at 21 Franklin Street (not extant) under economic attack because it was recognized as the meeting place of the Dallas County Voters League. Later, in 1959, Dr. Sullivan Jackson and his wife Richie Jean Sherrod Jackson testified before the U.S. Civil Rights Commission; upon returning home, both faced reprisals and Mrs. Jackson lost her position in the Selma Housing Authority.<sup>93</sup>

Movement, finally, came on school desegregation in 1956, but it was the strategy found throughout the South, one of building new, largely equal, but still separate facilities for African American children. School board officials detested the *Brown* rulings, but they added junior high classrooms in 1956 and a new elementary school for blacks in 1960 in an attempt to appease black parents rather than open any discussion of integration, which the WCC said was impossible for Selma. The town's two remaining black colleges also made significant changes. In 1956 Selma University ended its decades-old tradition of secondary education and became solely a junior college. Two years later Alabama Lutheran College began construction of new campus buildings (extant, now Concordia College) fronting Broad Street. In 1959, J.L. Chesnut, Jr., returned to Selma and became its first African American attorney, adding yet another piece of institutional infrastructure to the Civil Rights Movement. Chesnut's office was on the second floor of the Elks Building on Franklin Street.<sup>94</sup> Interestingly, one place of quiet integration was Trinity Lutheran Church (historic building is extant). It had been having meetings with black and white ministers four times a year. "These integrated meetings received no publicity, and other pastors in Selma were unaware of them."<sup>95</sup>

President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed the Civil Rights Act of 1957 into law September 9, 1957. The act established a Civil Rights Division in the Justice Department as well as a U.S. Civil Rights Commission to investigate allegations of voter infringement. Despite this new support for civil rights from the federal government, many activists criticized its scope because southern segregationists could delay investigations due to the federal government's limited manpower in the South and restricted access to records.<sup>96</sup>

New federal laws did not deter the extreme segregationists in Selma. The Ku Klux Klan established a Selma chapter in 1957.<sup>97</sup> Dallas County residents immediately noticed the Klan's presence due to initial acts of white supremacist intimidation specifically, cross burnings at town entry points.<sup>98</sup> Further, the Klan staged a motorcade parade that began with speeches at Selma Memorial Stadium and wound through the African-American neighborhoods.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Richie Jean Sherrod Jackson, *The House by the Side of the Road: The Selma Civil Rights Movement* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2011), 26. Other accounts say the testimony came in 1958.

<sup>94</sup> Chesnut and Cass, 92.

<sup>95</sup> Stephen L. Longenecker, *Selma's Peacemaker: Ralph Smeltzer and Civil Rights Mediation* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), 34.

<sup>96</sup> Garrow, 14.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 406.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> Discussion between George Wilson and Carroll Van West, Selma, Alabama, April 2012.

In the following year, in 1958, the state headquarters of White Citizens' Councils relocated to Selma under the direction of Senator Walter C. Givhan, and located offices (extant) on Water Street next to the newspaper.<sup>100</sup> The Selma WCC in the late 1950s and early 1960s exerted great influence on local radio and the town's single television station. Its large rallies typically took place at the Memorial Stadium on the west end of town. Also that year, after a heated contest, extremist Jim Clark defeated Wilson Baker for Sheriff of Dallas County. Clark was a political appointee for the duration of Sheriff William C. McCain's tenure thanks to then Alabama governor Jim Folsom. The citizens of greater Dallas County supported Clark overwhelmingly while Baker carried the Selma city vote. SNCC activist John Lewis has analyzed the later Clark—Judge James Hare—George Wallace association as “essentially the chain of command we faced in Selma: Judge Hare as an extension of George Wallace, and Jim Clark as an extension of Hare. With the judge and the governor behind him, Clark ran the county like a king. He really believed that the old racial order was the way things should be and that the black people of Dallas County were *happy* to have it that way.”<sup>101</sup>

Another court case involving a prominent African American leader further inflamed attitudes in 1959. Reverend Louis L. Anderson was pastor of Tabernacle Baptist Church. (He later lived in a two-story brick Craftsman styled dwelling (extant) on what is now L.L. Anderson Avenue). Rev. Anderson was successful plus under his leadership Tabernacle had gained a louder voice in the local activism for civil rights. Anderson, however, was involved in a terrible automobile accident that took the life of an African American pedestrian and a local all-white grand jury charged him with second-degree murder. Like the earlier Fikes trial, NAACP attorneys Peter Hall and Orzell Billingsley defended Anderson, to no avail. Despite conflicting testimony, and evidence that the accident had concussed Rev. Anderson leading to the pedestrian death, the all-white jury found Anderson guilty not of second-degree murder but of manslaughter, sentencing the prominent pastor to an unheard of sentence of 10 years. In 1961 the U.S. Supreme Court reversed Rev. Anderson's conviction since African American jurors had been systematically barred from juries in Selma.<sup>102</sup>

Whatever the medium from newspapers to the courtroom, the message from the white hierarchy in Selma to its African American citizens was the same: white unity and superiority at all costs. Leaders believed that their ardent fervor would unite white interests without which black citizens and businesses could not survive.<sup>103</sup> For instance, after publishing a list of non-member businesses and Selma professionals in the *Selma Times Journal*, the Dallas County WCC stated “We feel there are two organizations in this struggle – the NAACP, which wants to destroy everything we stand for, and the Citizens' Council, which wants to maintain segregation, peace, and good will.” In case the message was not clear, the article continues, “It's high time everyone decided which side he is on and joined one or the other.”<sup>104</sup> This aggressive stand

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<sup>100</sup> McMillen, 57.

<sup>101</sup> Lewis, 306.

<sup>102</sup> Thornton, 409-411.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 403.

<sup>104</sup> “Local Councils Are Active During Month,” Citizens' Council Paper, Vol. 4 (May 1959): 4.

drove many moderate white southerners to keep their views to themselves, contributing to the Council's impression of dominance.<sup>105</sup> Circuit Court Judge James Hare used his public courtroom to constantly argue for segregation. Judge Hare deplored "the efforts of some of our churches to give color of religion or morals to the problem of segregation. To me segregation is solely a social problem and to color it with religious or moral overtones is but to confuse and obscure the issue."<sup>106</sup>

To reinforce that message, adding overt physical intimidation to the mix, Sheriff Jim Clark in March 1960 held a ceremony on the steps of the recently expanded Dallas County Courthouse (extant) where he deputized hundreds of white citizens as a huge sheriff posse of both mounted and non-mounted members. On March 13, the posses paraded through town, making sure that black residents understood that the police were, literally, everywhere. When two months later, on May 6, 1960, President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed into law the Civil Rights Act of 1960, which established federal inspection of local voter registration polls and provided penalties for those obstructing attempts at registering or voting, it was as if Selma was a place and law unto itself.<sup>107</sup> The new federal civil rights law was designed to strengthen earlier federal statutes but many activists still saw the federal response as inadequate. For instance, due to prejudiced registration processes, by 1961 only 0.9 percent of Selma's eligible voters were black despite the fact that African Americans were the majority of the roughly 30,000 population at that time.<sup>108</sup> The Civil Rights Division of the Justice Department filed suit against the registration board of Dallas County.<sup>109</sup>

## **V. The Push for Voting Rights and Beyond, 1962-1972**

As historian George Lewis has noted, the civil rights "campaigns in Birmingham and Selma, in particular, have long been central to the canon of civil rights historiography, for they showcased the bravery, determination and essential dignity of the black freedom struggle's participants, as well as the political acumen of the movement's tacticians."<sup>110</sup> Therefore, this Multiple Property Nomination is not going to detail the Selma campaign from 1962-1965; other authoritative studies, such as Mills Thornton's *Dividing Lines* (2002), Taylor Branch's *Pillar of Fire* (1999) and *On Canaan's Edge* (2006) and David J. Garrow's *Protest at Selma* (1978) already exist as ready references. The following narrative rather focuses on significant events tied to extant properties that are associated with this nationally significant story.

The year 1962 marked a shift in the progress of the civil rights movement in Selma, with the arrival of the next wave of "outside" activists who wanted to work with local citizens to move civil rights forward in Selma. Bernard Lafayette came to Selma on behalf of the

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<sup>105</sup> Thornton, 405.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 401.

<sup>107</sup> Garrow, 14.

<sup>108</sup> Lawson, 278.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> George Lewis, *Massive Resistance: The White Response to the Civil Rights Movement* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2006), 156.

Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), an organization that had emerged from the Nashville Student Movement, which had successfully desegregated Nashville's downtown lunch counters. Lafayette, along with John Lewis, Diane Nash, James Bevel, and others formed the organization out of a desire to continue their work, which followed the nonviolent teaching and training of James Lawson. Lafayette participated in the Freedom Rides in 1961, but had returned to Nashville in 1962 to complete his education. Though he had been a student at the American Baptist Theological Seminary, he was given a full scholarship at Fisk University (along with John Lewis). Lafayette found himself restless and unable to concentrate after the excitement of his more activist role, and soon left Fisk for the Atlanta headquarters of SNCC.<sup>111</sup>

Eager to direct his own project, Lafayette was frustrated by SNCC's unwillingness to let him do so. He finally volunteered to go work in Selma, Alabama on the voter registration effort. His wife Colia Liddell Lafayette (a former Mississippi voter registration activist) and Frank Holloway (a former Atlanta University activist) joined Lafayette. Two previous SNCC delegations had gone to Selma and reported that there was no chance for the movement to succeed there because of African American passiveness and especially the aggressiveness of the segregationists. Lafayette began in Tuskegee, where he researched for a week at the institute to figure out the best approach for Selma. He then met with Amelia Boynton, who along with Marie Foster hosted him in Selma. The two women convinced Lafayette to begin work in Selma.<sup>112</sup> Foster had started a voter's education class; she was the sister of Dr. Sullivan Jackson, a black dentist, and was a dental hygienist herself. Lafayette served as the director for the SNCC Alabama Voter Registration Project starting in 1962, and he and Colia L. Lafayette began their voter registration clinics in February 1963.<sup>113</sup>

Lafayette initially worked from the Boynton's insurance office in the Sullivan Building downtown. He met here with the group, Ernest Doyle, Mrs. Boynton, Marie Foster, James Gildersleeve, Ulysses Blackman, Rev. Henry Shannon, Jr., Rev. J. D. Hunter, and Dr. F. D. Reese, collectively known as the Courageous Eight.<sup>114</sup> These leaders, along with such activists as J. L. Chesnut, Margaret Moore, and Loretta Carter Price (Wimberly), met regularly despite the threat of violence from the local white community. Their willingness to defy intimidation eventually encouraged others to do the same.

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<sup>111</sup> David Halberstam, *The Children* (New York: Random House, 1998).

<sup>112</sup> Leon E. Frazier, "Civil Rights Icon Dr. Bernard LaFayette 4, 2008," accessed August 1, 2012, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZRDTdg\\_SWuk&feature=relmfu](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZRDTdg_SWuk&feature=relmfu).

<sup>113</sup> "Lafayette, Bernard (1940-)," King Encyclopedia, accessed August 1, 2012, [http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/kingweb/about\\_king/encyclopedia/lafayette\\_bernard.html](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/kingweb/about_king/encyclopedia/lafayette_bernard.html). The Voter Registration Project was not Lafayette's first encounter with Selma. During the Freedom Rides, his bus was rerouted away from Selma after the incident in Anniston, Alabama. There were some 2,000 people waiting to attack the riders when the bus pulled into Selma. Although the Rides had attracted (and would continue to attract) large angry mobs, the crowd at Selma was very large, given the size of the town (there were approximately 28,400 people living in Selma according to the 1960 census).

<sup>114</sup> Leon Frazier, "Civil Rights Icon Dr. Bernard LaFayette - 7, 2008," accessed December 29, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N4dMyIw2PQ8>.

Lafayette's first success came at Selma University, where Benny Tucker, Willie C. Robertson and others signed up to be assistants and help recruit students to the cause. Selma University president J. H. Owens, however, did not like Lafayette on campus and warned students not to get involved.<sup>115</sup> Lafayette met a similar reaction at most of the town's black middle-class organizations; therefore, Lafayette turned to the teenagers of Selma, targeting audiences at Selma University on one end of Lapsley Avenue and at Hudson High School on the opposite end. The principal at Hudson High School, Joseph T. Yelder, threatened to have Lafayette arrested if he did not keep his organizing efforts off campus.<sup>116</sup>

Rather than working on his own, Lafayette, encouraged by Marie Foster, pursued the Voter Registration Project by joining the Dallas County Voters League as a staff member. SNCC encouraged its members to take advantage of existing organizations to cultivate local leadership, which Lafayette did through the DCVL. When Lafayette arrived, Marie Foster and Amelia Boynton were already teaching black residents how to register to vote, carrying on the work of her husband, Sam Boynton.<sup>117</sup> The Foster-Lafayette voter registration clinics taught residents how to register and how to deal with literacy tests. Unfortunately, the elder leader of black voter registration drives in Selma was now ill; Sam Boynton was in very poor health, having suffered a series of strokes. He was hospitalized in 1963, though this did not prevent him from encouraging people to vote. Whenever conscious, he would call out to passersby, "Are you registered to vote? I want you to go down and register. A voteless people is a hopeless people."<sup>118</sup> Lafayette spent several weeks in the hospital at Sam Boynton's side to relieve Mrs. Boynton whenever possible, and when Sam Boynton finally passed in May, Lafayette decided to use the memorial service as a mass meeting to encourage people to register to vote. In order to partially conceal the nature of the meeting, Lafayette billed it as a "Memorial Service for Mr. Boynton and Voter Registration."<sup>119</sup>

Despite the widespread community respect for Sam Boynton, Lafayette struggled to find a church willing to host the memorial service/mass meeting. According to Lafayette, the people had good reason to be afraid of the WCC and the KKK. There were never any bombings in Selma; daily intimidation was enough to discourage any sort of overt opposition to the status quo. Every white male in Selma over age 21 could be deputized, and Sheriff Jim Clark had a standing mounted posse armed with nightsticks made from table legs manufactured in town, along with their personal firearms. The earlier white response to the attempt to desegregate the schools in the 1950s, which included harassment of the family members of those who signed the petition along with targeting of the signatories themselves, also discouraged the black community from

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<sup>115</sup> Chesnut and Cass, 153-54.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 159-161.

<sup>117</sup> Ruth C. Bryant, "Amelia Boynton Robinson," in the Encyclopedia of Alabama, September 19, 2012.

<sup>118</sup> Taylor Branch, *Pillar of Fire: America in the King Years, 1963-65* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998), 82.

<sup>119</sup> Bertram J. Levine, *Resolving Racial Conflict: The Community Relations Service and Civil Rights, 1964-1989* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2005), 47.

banding together.<sup>120</sup> Signs at the state level were just as ominous. Newly elected Gov. George Wallace, who enjoyed strong support from the Ku Klux Klan and the White Citizens' Council, had pronounced in his inauguration speech, "I say segregation now, segregation tomorrow, and segregation forever."

First Baptist Church, Boynton's own church, declined to hold the memorial service and meeting. First Baptist had avoided controversy for over a decade, having sent away, in 1952, a young Fred D. Shuttlesworth out of concern that he was too aggressive, even arrogant. After much debate and controversy among the deacons of Tabernacle Baptist Church (opposition to hosting the meeting was led by Dr. William H. Dinkins), Reverend Lewis L. Anderson agreed to host the mass meeting at Tabernacle on May 14, 1963.<sup>121</sup> According to J. L. Chestnut, Jr., Rev. Anderson had told his deacons that "he'd hold the mass meeting on the sidewalk outside and, with a loudspeaker, tell the public the officers were too scared to open the doors. Anderson told me Dr. Dinkins literally broke down and cried, told him 'You are deserting your friends and going with strangers.'"<sup>122</sup>

Throughout the meeting, the police surrounded the church, taking notes of who was attending; Chestnut estimated 350 blacks were there.<sup>123</sup> Sheriff Jim Clark and his men even entered the church armed to supervise the meeting, claiming they were there to prevent any insurrection. Toward the end of the meeting, Lafayette introduced James Forman, executive director of SNCC, to give a sermon titled "The High Cost of Freedom." Forman encouraged the community to stand up for itself in front of Jim Clark and all those who stood between them and the ballot box. When the meeting finally ended, the churchgoers were able to exit no further than the steps onto Broad Street, where a large white mob had gathered, including members of Clark's posse, armed with their table-leg nightsticks. The crowd only dispersed when the Selma High School football coach arrived and started pointing out his current and former players and telling them to go home.<sup>124</sup>

The Tabernacle meeting revived interest in voting among the black community. It was long, slow, unglamorous work, but in order to file suit stating that blacks were being denied the right to vote, they had to be able to demonstrate that they were in fact attempting to vote. According to a SNCC field report from 1963, the Lafayettes had held bi-weekly classes and by the spring, around 150 black Selma residents had attempted to register to vote. The report concluded that:

As with many SNCC projects, one of the most successful aspects of the project has been work with young people. Building on an already existing gang structure, the staff has developed a democratically controlled group of high school age students who have aided with registration and held their own

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<sup>120</sup> Leon Frazier, "Civil Rights Icon Dr. Bernard LaFayette - 6 2008," accessed December 29, 2012, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yIvgH3VW6BI&feature=youtube\\_gdata\\_player](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yIvgH3VW6BI&feature=youtube_gdata_player).

<sup>121</sup> Branch, 83.

<sup>122</sup> Chestnut and Cass, 163.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>124</sup> Branch, 84.

weekly citizenship training meetings. With the help of these students and a group of interested adults, the entire town of Selma has almost been canvassed for the first time. Several of the students came to the SNCC conference for their first interracial group experience, an experience which in itself developed new leadership and new expectation.<sup>125</sup>

Not all of the older generation of civil rights activists in Selma supported the SNCC strategy. Lafayette had support from Alabama Lutheran teacher Ulysses Blackman, the insurance agent Ernest Doyle, Rev. John D. Hunter (another insurance agent and former NAACP leader), DCVL vice-president James Gildersleeve and barber Henry W. Shannon, each of whom represented key constituencies (and were members of the Courageous Eight). But other powerful groups wondered if confrontation was the right approach. DCVL president Robert Reagin, Pleasant L. Lindsey of Selma University, and educator Jackson C. Lawson opposed Lafayette's methods. Reagin resigned from the DCVL leadership but was succeeded by Lawson, who later resigned because he disagreed with the use of children as demonstrators. Other important leaders, including Reformed Presbyterian minister Claude C. Brown, businessman Edwin Moss (who worked with the Edmundite brothers) and Selma University president James Owens, who had been encouraged by a possible split among white leadership, opposed direct action tactics out of fears that it would again unify the whites.<sup>126</sup> Another division that impeded the cause was the suspicion and often dismissive attitudes held by African American ministers towards the Catholic St. Elizabeth mission and school.

Though the 1963 report indicates that there was relatively little police interference in SNCC activities in Selma that spring, there is some indication that the situation would soon escalate. The report points out that a local resident's house received a shotgun blast, a taxi driver was arrested for having a voter registration manual, and there were rumors of intimidation circulating.<sup>127</sup> There were no mass meetings in Selma until the death of Sam Boynton because churches were unwilling to offer their buildings out of fear of bombing and other reprisals. The firing of the teachers in the aftermath of the desegregation petition had underscored the severity with which the white community would respond to challenges to the status quo. This intimidation extended to white ministers who showed support. Fr. Maurice Quelett of St. Elizabeth's received threats after he spoke out against the tactics of Sheriff Jim Clark.<sup>128</sup>

Yet more conservative activists took developments at the Selma Public Library (extant) in the spring and early summer as a positive sign. Lafayette had directed students there in an attempt to desegregate this public space; surprisingly library staff allowed the students to use the library. After Mayor Heinz pressured the library board to remove

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<sup>125</sup> 1963 SNCC field report, accessed December 29, 2012, PDF link available from: <http://www.crmvet.org/docs/snccrpts.htm>, page 3.

<sup>126</sup> Thornton, 448.

<sup>127</sup> The SNCC registration project also reached into surrounding rural counties such as Wilcox County, where SNCC workers thought "living conditions and technical knowledge remain approximately the same as before slavery was abolished."

<sup>128</sup> "Civil Rights History."

tables and chairs--so blacks and whites could not mingle--librarian Patricia S. Blalock convinced her board to let her issue library cards to African American patrons.<sup>129</sup>

The SNCC report concludes with a summary the bleak statistics in Dallas County. It had a total population of 56,667 with 57.7 percent nonwhite. Only .9 percent of eligible blacks were registered to vote. Eighty-three percent of nonwhites made less than \$3,000/year, 78 percent of farmed land was owned by whites, and nonwhites constituted 72.7 percent of tenant farmers.<sup>130</sup>

The SNCC report was correct in its prediction that violence would escalate in Selma. On June 12, 1963, as part of a three-state conspiracy, which included the assassination of Medgar Evers by Byron De La Beckwith in Mississippi and the beating of a Congress on Racial Equality worker in Louisiana, Bernard Lafayette was attacked and brutally beaten. Despite suffering serious injuries, Lafayette was undeterred, knowing that now he had the look of a martyr, and he was willing to use that image to further the cause. Lafayette did find that additional churches were now ready to open their doors for voter rights meetings and training. First Baptist Church, for one, reversed course and opened its doors that summer. Soon others followed and attendance rose from 500 to 600 in the summer to 800 by September.<sup>131</sup>

Then came an unexpected ruling from the federal government that gave military base commanders the authority to declare a town “off limits” to personnel if it consistently and aggressively pursued segregation against military personnel. Selma blacks approached the commander at Craig base to declare Selma as “off limits;” the commander demurred, pointing out that his servicemen had not been molested in the town. SNCC then convinced a small group of black soldiers to come to Selma, watch a movie in the white section of the theater and eat at a white restaurant. Surprisingly, Selma officials did nothing--it might be segregation forever but few white leaders wanted bad relations with the base.<sup>132</sup>

In the first half of 1963, two distinct camps of civil rights activists had emerged in Selma. One was middle-class and older and associated with the newly formed Dallas County Improvement Association, led by Edwin Moss, Rev. Claude C. Brown of Reformed Presbyterian, Rev. Clinton C. Hunter of Clinton Chapel AME Zion, Dr. William B. Dinkins of Selma University, Rev. Louis L. Anderson of Tabernacle Baptist Church, and Rev. Marshall C. Cleveland, Jr., of First Baptist Church. The second was centered on the SNCC activists and was younger, more working class, and less willing to take moderate steps. Three SNCC activists, Wilson N. Brown, Bennie Tucker, and James Austin, learned that the Improvement Association planned to present the city with a moderate petition, asking for an end of “white” and “colored” signs in public places, increased black voter registration, ending police brutality, and hiring African American policemen and fire fighters--all steps virtually unthinkable a year earlier. The SNCC activists

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<sup>129</sup> Thornton, 452.

<sup>130</sup> SNCC report., 4.

<sup>131</sup> Thornton, 451.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 457.

thought the petition did not go nearly far enough and they quietly set up their own meeting with the mayor--who did not know them and knew nothing of their agenda. The activists afterwards announced to the local newspaper that Mayor Heinz had planned to meet with them to discuss integration of all public facilities, movie theaters, the removal of all segregated signage and the hiring not only of black policemen and firemen but also on the public utility crews. Heinz repudiated the petition and pledged his undying commitment to segregation. When the Improvement Association attempted to meet with Mayor Heinz, they never got farther than the chief of police. The Selma WCC and KKK then held a huge public rally at Memorial Stadium--attended by more than 6,000--where total commitment to white supremacy and segregation was confirmed. The SNCC activists had discredited the Improvement Association before both white and black audiences; and the city reconfirmed its commitment to fight desegregation with its last breath.<sup>133</sup>

Both sides were radicalized by events in September. On September 15, 1963, 16<sup>th</sup> Street Baptist Church in Birmingham was bombed, killing four young girls who happened to be in the basement. Many in the SNCC contingent in Selma left to go help in Birmingham but the local streets filled with demonstrators outraged by the violence in Birmingham but also determined to begin to push for an economic boycott against white businessmen. Chuck Bonner, who was 16 at the time and had been working with SNCC in Selma, discusses how the students began to take action:

The bombing happened and it was all in the news, and Cleo and Terry and I got together, decided we should respond to this, we should take some action in response to this bombing. And we talked to students, we all got together at the Tabernacle Church, and we decided we should have a demonstration. We called the SNCC office, ... in Atlanta, and we tried and we tried to get Julian Bond, to get someone to come down, some adult, to help us carry out what was going to be our first demonstration — we had never had a demonstration.

We couldn't get anybody to come down — so we did it anyway. And that's the occasion when Willie C. Robinson went in to Carter's Drug Store (extant) along with the other group of demonstrators, and Carter — the owner of the drug store — hit him with an axe handle or something like that, busted his head, and he had to have seven stitches. Four students were arrested, and then the Movement was on. We immediately organized some other demonstrations, we didn't want those students to be lonely in jail and we sent down another brigade of students, and they were arrested...

We were sitting-in at lunch counters. We sat-in at Carter's, we sat-in at Kress's we sat-in at Thirsty Boy. We went into libraries, and we just kept sitting in at different places. But then in October, I believe it was October 7th, I don't remember the exact date, it was early October, we had what was called "Freedom Day." And at this point, Bernard had been replaced,

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 452-453.

because he had gone up to Birmingham and another field secretary named Worth Long had been sent down to Selma. And Worth Long led those demonstrations out. Worth Long was severely beaten during that October demonstration.<sup>134</sup>

The demonstrations from Selma's youth--the majority of whom were Hudson High School students--were met with brutal jail terms for many since they were sent to convict work camps outside of Selma and Camden, or if caught a second time, to the notorious black juvenile reformatory at Mount Meigs. Adult demonstrators on downtown streets did everything they could not to trigger white retaliation, particularly following etiquette on the sidewalks to step aside for approaching whites but also not to block the sidewalks. But merely walking in separated pairs staying on the sidewalk was not enough to avoid arrest. Judge Edgar Russell ruled that even these demonstrations were unlawful parades: downtown sidewalks were not for any sort of black gathering. Worth Long also organized daily demonstrations at the Dallas County Courthouse, where hundreds would line up waiting for their turn to register to vote, patiently standing on the sidewalk at the courthouse's side entrance and doing their best not to impede other pedestrian traffic. Deliberate delays by courthouse officials meant that few registrations were ever processed, but Long and other civil rights activists did not worry about that result—they liked the media attention that the over-reactions of Sheriff Jim Clark gave to the demonstrators. Standing in line on the sidewalks outside of the Dallas County Courthouse became an iconic image of the Civil Rights Movement in Selma. Another reality was that Selma's black youth would not be deterred—on September 29, 1963, four African American teenagers tried to attend services at the white First Baptist Church; when they were turned away, they crossed the street and entered the First Presbyterian Church. Ushers took them to the balcony but left them alone.<sup>135</sup>

The situation in Selma attracted more attention from SNCC, and John Lewis, then SNCC Chairman, returned to Selma after the funeral of the four girls killed in Birmingham. In his six-month report given in December 1963, Lewis described his visit, which culminated in his being jailed for two weeks in Dallas County for picketing the courthouse, which he facetiously calls a two-week vacation at the "Dallas County Manor." Lewis observed:

The slogan of my Washington speech One Man – One Vote, was never put into visible operation until signs were carried in Selma shouting this demand. In a real sense, this slogan served to awaken the Negro community to the issue of voting and the part in the civil responsibility they have a duty to play. To the Southern white power structure, it demonstrated that they would have to use every means available to suppress this movement. The extreme, brutal attempts to quash registration in Selma served notice on Negroes everywhere in the South—as well as all citizens in the rest of the nation—that

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<sup>134</sup> "Oral History/Interview: Charles Bonner and Bettie Mae Fikes," 2005, Civil Rights Movement Veterans, <http://www.crmvet.org/nars/chuckbet.htm>; "15 Negro Pupils Arrested in Selma," Washington Post, September 24, 1963.

<sup>135</sup> Longenecker, 30.

the white Southern power structure will continue to use brute force, and flagrantly violate constitutional laws (as well as the laws of human decency) in order to deprive Negroes of their rights. One thing we can learn from Selma is that we can effectively have a positive program of Direct Action centered around Voter Registration.<sup>136</sup>

With John Lewis still in jail, and in response to lackluster involvement of the federal government on behalf of the 300 plus Selma residents who had been arrested between September 15 and October 2, SNCC declared October 7, 1963 Freedom Day in Selma.<sup>137</sup> They held mass meetings, including one on October 5 in which the comedian Dick Gregory railed against the white Southern establishment at a mass meeting at First Baptist Church.<sup>138</sup> Author James Baldwin also arrived to take part in Freedom Day. (A list of attacks on SNCC workers from this period appears on page 4 of a SNCC special report from February 1965.<sup>139</sup>)

Freedom Day marked a change in SNCC strategy: mass voter registration attempts flooding the courthouse grounds and downtown streets and sidewalks with potential voters. Approximately 350 black Selma residents lined up all day waiting to register to vote. Deputies kept anyone from bringing food or water to those in line. They attacked and then arrested two SNCC workers (field secretaries Avery Williams and Chico Neblett) for attempting to provide relief. Despite the fact that only a dozen or so people were allowed to even enter the courthouse to attempt to register, the mood at a mass meeting that night was jubilant. Whites felt otherwise and immediately took retaliatory steps. Charles B. Dunn of Dunn's Rest Home (extant) fired Ann Cooper and Elnora Collins for attempting to register to vote. Dunn attempted to take Collins' photograph so he could circulate the image, ensuring that she could not get a new job. Collins refused to pose, thus Dunn "took his cattle prod, struck her across her back with all of his might until she turned to protect her self."<sup>140</sup> Dunn's actions outraged all of the approximately 40 African American employees at the nursing home, and they left in protest. Dunn fired all of them. Amelia Boynton then asked SNCC to help the Dallas County Voters League to acquire "ONE HIGH POWERD [sic] SEWING MACHINE" so the women could make money through sewing activities. The sewing operation was eventually established in the basement of First Baptist Church. Rev. Ralph Smeltzer of the Church of the Brethren arrived in Selma to help the women, and he then stayed to become an important white activist for civil rights in 1964 and 1965.

SNCC workers were encouraged. Selma's Freedom Day attracted some attention from the national press; a *Washington Post* article cites James Forman as saying that Selma

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<sup>136</sup> John Lewis, "Six Month Report (July-December)" SNCC, PDF available at: [http://www.crmvet.org/docs/6312\\_sncc\\_lewis\\_rpt.pdf](http://www.crmvet.org/docs/6312_sncc_lewis_rpt.pdf).

<sup>137</sup> United Press International, "Selma, Ala. Jails 132 Negroes In Civil Rights Demonstrations," *Washington Post*, September 25, 1963.

<sup>138</sup> Chesnut and Cass, 170; "Negro Crowds Register to Vote In Alabama; Newsmen Beaten," *Washington Post*, October 9, 1963.

<sup>139</sup> "Special Report on Selma, Alabama," SNCC, February 4, 1965, PDF from: [http://www.crmvet.org/docs/selma\\_sncc\\_rpt.pdf](http://www.crmvet.org/docs/selma_sncc_rpt.pdf).

<sup>140</sup> Amelia Boynton to James Forman, November 30, 1963, SNCC Files.

will serve as a test of both the mass-registration technique and the reaction of the federal government to the denial of the voting rights of black citizens.<sup>141</sup> And the events had spurred another mass meeting at Tabernacle Baptist Church. Bruce Boynton, the son of Sam Boynton, spoke and a group of local residents James Porter, Clyde Jones, Cleophus Olds and W. J. Anderson, Jr., belted out the old spiritual “Go down Moses,” pointing at Sheriff Jim Clark as they sang “let my people go.” “The church just roared,” recalled J. J. Chesnut, Jr.<sup>142</sup> Boynton and other DCVL activists decided in October to contact the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and get Dr. Martin Luther King involved in the struggle in Selma. Boynton wrote King on October 6: “The entire city of Selma and Dallas County are anxiously awaiting your coming to Selma to address the citizens. We certainly hope nothing will prevent your being with us as your coming will be and is well advertised.”<sup>143</sup> On October 15, The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., escorted by Justice department officials, spoke at Tabernacle Baptist Church. King’s appearance later became the subject of two state grand jury investigations since Justice Department officials had given King a ride to Selma after his car failed to start at Birmingham’s Gaston Motel, where he was staying.<sup>144</sup>

That fall a group of white moderates--men who still envisioned a segregated society but one with enough compromises that the black discontent would be abated--began to meet with Rev. Smeltzer and Rev. John Newton of the Presbyterian church (extant). These moderates, which included the presidents of both the City National Bank and Selma National Bank, met at the People’s Bank and in next spring’s mayoral election they helped to elect Joe Smitherman to replace Mayor Heinz.<sup>145</sup> Later in 1964, before Smitherman took office, they met with black moderates Edwin Moss, Rev. Claude C. Brown, and Dr. Frederick D. Reese.

On December 13-16, 1963, SNCC activists met with other Civil Rights veterans to review the last year’s activities and develop new strategies for 1964.<sup>146</sup> Myles Horton and Conrad Brown from the Highlander Folk School in Tennessee facilitated the workshop. Selma participants included Worth Long, Willie C. Robertson, Wilson Brown, James Austin, Tom Brown, and Rev. Bennie Tucker. Worth Long reported that SNCC had successfully had about 800 Selma blacks at the courthouse for registration and that 320 had completed the process but county officials had only approved a handful. The group decided one stumbling block was leadership. Participants observed that “our role is to organize organizers. We should be advisors, not leaders of a community.” Another added that “our role is to give people in a community insight into what they can do.” Another difficulty was the growing divide between SNCC and the Dallas County Voters League. SNCC felt that the voters league “want to continue doing things in the old, established way.” SNCC decided to focus its role on “people in community who can

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<sup>141</sup> “Selma Seen as Test In Negro Voter Rights,” Washington Post, October 12, 1963.

<sup>142</sup> Chesnut and Cass, 170-171.

<sup>143</sup> A. F. Boynton to Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., October 3, 1963, letter displayed at Lowndes County Interpretive Center, Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail.

<sup>144</sup> Branch, *Pillar of Fire*, 155.

<sup>145</sup> Thornton, 465-66.

<sup>146</sup> The following discussion relies on Phil Davis, “[Report on Selma Workshop](#): December 13-16, 1963,” SNCC files, provided by George Wilson of Selma to MTSU Center for Historic Preservation.

take initiative and carry out activities.” But in doing so SNCC realized that it needed to connect directly with communities. As one participant noted: “regardless of how much literature, pamphlets are circulated nothing creates as lasting an impression as one person talking to another. To the Negro—if it’s written, or on the radio or TV it’s white propaganda. Look for the key persons in a community who are the communications centers of their area. The town gossip can spread the word faster than radio or TV.” SNCC in Selma in 1964-65 established a stronger presence in the black northwest neighborhood along Lapsley Avenue, moving away from the earlier reliance on the Boynton’s office in downtown Selma. SNCC joined the Dallas County Voters League in offices located at a one-story brick building on the corner of 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue and Lapsley Avenue (extant). The building’s corner entrance faced Hudson High School and contained a white-owned grocery but in the back were offices for the voters league, SNCC and George Wilson, Sr., a local building contractor. From this non-descript, but well located, office, SNCC recruited more students to work the streets and neighborhoods to more directly get out the word.

Just days after the Selma workshop, Selma police on December 20 “raided” SNCC offices, removing correspondence—some of it related to the Dunn Rest Home incident—and arresting James Austin, Joseph Picket, Frank Spivey, and William C. Robertson while also detaining Louise Johnson and David Murray for distributing handbills urging consumers to “Don’t Buy Segregation.” Even the printers of the handbill, J.D. Pritchett, Sr., and J.D. Pritchett, Jr., were arrested for printing this piece calling for an economic boycott.<sup>147</sup>

Another SNCC technique was to work more closely, where possible, with church congregations. Mass meetings at Selma’s black churches continued into 1964. Amelia Boynton Robinson recalled: “it was heartwarming to have the doors of the churches open to us, although the ministers were still uncommitted, in spite of the pleas of their deacons and other church leaders for them to take an active part. The grassroots people [black working-class] were most concerned about showing their profound interest and were determined to work with us.” Their singing at the meetings “made the most faint-hearted and discouraged feel the reality of the struggle, and the progress being made for white and black alike.”<sup>148</sup> Mt. Zion Primitive Baptist Church, for instance, held its first acknowledged mass meeting on June 23, 1963.<sup>149</sup> In 1963 SNCC activists developed a list of ministers that indicated some level of support.<sup>150</sup> The churches included:

Green Street Baptist Church, Rev. C. A. Lett  
 Tabernacle Baptist Church, Rev. L. L. Anderson  
 First Baptist Church, Rev. M.C. Cleveland  
 Morning Star Baptist Church, Rev. I.C. Acuff

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<sup>147</sup> The Student Voice, December 30, 1963.

<sup>148</sup> Robinson, 232.

<sup>149</sup> *Churches of Selma Prior to 1925* (Selma: Madden and Associates, n.d.), 31.

<sup>150</sup> “Ministers of Selma,” SNCC Files, provided by George Wilson of Selma to MTSU Center for Historic Preservation.

Mt. Zion Primitive Baptist Church, Rev. B.F. McDole  
 Ebenezer Baptist Church, Rev. A. B. White  
 Shiloh Baptist Church, Rev. J.E. Noble  
 West Trinity Baptist Church, minister not listed  
 Little Canaan Primitive Baptist Church, Rev. S. B. Acuff  
 St. Paul AME (mistyped, should be CME) Church, Rev. N. N. Baity  
 Brown Chapel AME Church, Rev. W.T. Minefee  
 Clinton Chapel AME Zion Church, Rev. C. C. Hunter  
 Reformed Presbyterian Church, Rev. C. C. Brown  
 Temple Gate Seventh Day Adventist Church, Elder F.O. Jones

New ministers also interjected new energy in the struggle. For example in 1964, Rev. T. R. Harris arrived at St. Paul CME Church and soon opened its doors and his influence for the civil rights movement; Rev. Jonathan Daniels, a white Episcopal minister, later gave a sermon here. Brown Chapel AME Church, First Baptist Church, Tabernacle Baptist Church, Second Baptist Church, Shiloh Baptist Church, Green Street Baptist Church, Ebenezer Baptist Church, Little Canaan Primitive Baptist Church, West Trinity Baptist Church, Mt. Zion Primitive Baptist Church, Reformed Presbyterian Church, and Clinton Chapel AME Zion Church all became meeting locations. Several of the churches expanded community rooms to better serve their congregations. A few white congregations joined the much earlier effort of the Edmundite missionaries at St. Elizabeth's to support the efforts. Father Maurice Quellet from 1961 forward tried to encourage communications between the activists and moderate whites in Selma.

This institutionalization of a movement culture within the African American churches of Selma in 1963-1964 proved to be the significant building block for the events of 1965. As discussed earlier, the churches had long been an institutional bulwark for African American identity and civic action. Clearly throughout the first half of the twentieth century, the brutal imposition of white supremacy in all aspects of Selma life made many ministers and congregations wary of change and anxious to retain whatever voice and influence they possessed. But as Selma blacks gained confidence from the small steps of 1950 to 1963 the earlier conservatism began to wane, replaced by a more determined effort to move forward in step with the Civil Rights activists who began to increase in numbers in 1963-64.

The physical signs of change and confidence had expanded everywhere in Black Selma in the last few years. Selma University in 1960 had added the modernist-styled Stone-Robinson Library facing Lapsley Avenue. In September 1963, Mt. Zion Primitive Baptist opened its new educational building under the guidance of Rev. B. F. McDole. Green Street Baptist Church, under Rev. Charles A. Lett, had continued a program of renovating the historic sanctuary but also adding an education and community service wing (1962) to the church. From the kitchen at Green Street would come meals for the Selma-to-Montgomery marchers. Providence Baptist Church, a new congregation aligned with the Progressive Baptist Church movement, built a new sanctuary (1962) in the center of northwest Selma nearby St. Paul CME Church and Ward Chapel AME Church. Shiloh Baptist Church had welcomed the Rev. R. L. Flowers as its new

minister in 1963. As a church history details, “under his leadership, we are enjoying working together in beautifying our church. We have added oak floors, fine paneled the inside, added a kitchen, dining room, secretary room, classrooms, enlarged the choir room and pastor’s study, added new years and bricked the church.” In December 1964 the Edmundite ministers and Sisters of St. Joseph opened a modernist-styled and fully equipped four-story Good Samaritan Hospital on Broad Street, next to the St. Elizabeth mission and a few blocks away from Tabernacle Baptist Church.<sup>151</sup> “Good Samaritan was the place where African Americans were taken in emergency situations, specifically after police shootings or racially motivated beatings,” observed historian Amy L. Koehlinger. “The sisters who staffed the hospital emergency room saw the worst of Selma’s racial violence.”<sup>152</sup>

The July 2 passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 has been justly celebrated as a true turning point in the national Civil Rights Movement, a recognition that for most of the South the days of Jim Crow were dimming. Acceptance of the new law did not easily happen in Selma. The news from Washington encouraged SNCC workers and local activists to immediately test Jim Crow in Selma. The Thirsty Boy Drive-In (not extant), already involved in a lawsuit, became a particular focus.<sup>153</sup> On July 4, four members of the Selma Literacy Project, which had been operating out of the Good Samaritan Hospital and the Edmundite mission<sup>154</sup> attempted to eat at the restaurant, and were arrested by Sheriff Clark and his deputies, who made use of their cattle prods in the process, and their vehicle was impounded.<sup>155</sup> Following the arrest of these workers, local Selma blacks, primarily Hudson High School students and other young people went to the movie theatre and sat in the white-only section. They were also arrested, and the Dallas County Jail filled steadily as hundreds began engaging in civil disobedience.<sup>156</sup> Rev. Ralph Smeltzer of the National Council of Churches discovered in his informal survey of white restaurants that some planned to resist while others planned to adapt and accept the law. No one, however, wanted to be the front-runner on this issue.<sup>157</sup>

On July 5, there was a mass meeting at Green Street Baptist Church, featuring an address from Rev. Ralph Abernathy of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. The reaction of Sheriff Clark was detailed in the decision of the appellate court involved in *United States v. Clark*:

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<sup>151</sup> Notes taken from field visits to these properties in September 2012. Also see: “Mt. Zion Anniversary,” *Souvenir Program of the 75<sup>th</sup> Jubilee Anniversary, Green street Baptist Church* (Selma: Green Street Baptist Church, 1961); “Shiloh Baptist Church, Second Family & Friends Days, May 27,28, & 29, 1988,” pamphlet provided to MTSU Center for Historic Preservation, September 2012.

<sup>152</sup> Koehlinger, 164.

<sup>153</sup> Associated Press, “Selma restaurant that became civil rights landmark closes,” *Gadsden [Alabama] Times*, April 3, 1985,; Associated Press, “Café that became a landmark closes,” *The Tuscaloosa News*, April 3, 1985.

<sup>154</sup> Cheryl Lynn Greenberg, *A circle of trust : remembering SNCC* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 94; Longenecker, 79-80.

<sup>155</sup> “The Road to Civil Rights: Voting Rights March,” U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Highways Administration,” April 4, 2011, <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/highwayhistory/road/s35.cfm>.

<sup>156</sup> Greenberg, 95.

<sup>157</sup> Longenecker, 83-84.

On the night of July 5, a Negro mass meeting was held on Green Street in Selma, and the sheriff sent 50 to 65 possemen to the scene. As the meeting ended and the Negroes were moving from the hall, someone threw a rock at the line of "possemen." The possemen responded immediately, moving into the crowd of Negroes with night sticks; tear gas was also used on the crowd. Two white newsmen who were known to the solicitor and the sheriff's deputies were beaten and their photographic equipment destroyed or rendered useless by the posse members; Negroes were clubbed - in one instance at least a block and a half from the meeting hall - and some were hospitalized; Negroes living nearby had windows broken from their homes; porch lights were either turned out or knocked out, and all Negroes were ordered off the streets. Sheriff Clark and Solicitor McLeod were also on the scene. No medical attention was given or offered the newsmen; instead, they were advised by Solicitor McLeod to leave Selma immediately.<sup>158</sup>

The next day, a group of 50 residents led by SNCC activist John Lewis, went to the courthouse to register, but "they were arrested by Clark's heavily armed men, who freely used electric cattle prods on their prisoners as they were marched off to jail."<sup>159</sup> The white officials soon dropped a legal bomb on the civil rights activists in Selma--an injunction banning any gatherings, basically, whatsoever. On July 9, 1964, Circuit Court Judge Hare issued an injunction (enforced by Sheriff Clark and his men): "against some 47 individuals, most of them Negroes, and 15 organizations, many of them active in behalf of the Negroes' civil rights movement, and the Ku Klux Klan, National States Rights Party, et al. Among other things, the injunction bars all of them from gatherings of three or more persons on a public street or in a public place. The basis for the injunction was a complaint - verified by Sheriff Clark and supported by a number of affidavits which were exhibited to Judge Hare, but not filed. Sixteen local Negro ministers were among the defendants named by the injunction; twelve of the defendants were in jail at the time of the issuance."<sup>160</sup>

From the moderate perspective, so much racial progress had been made in the past year that they felt Selma blacks should be satisfied with this pace of change; the injunction in their minds was a logical step to calm the situation. But civil rights activists were not so satisfied. The groundwork had been laid through SNCC and the local leadership; the voting rights effort had become a movement rather than a project, and the SNCC workers had shown that Selma could attract the attention of the national press. Like in Birmingham, Selma had an aggressive, volatile sheriff who could be goaded into putting on a shocking display of violence that would underscore the severity of the situation for a national audience. However, after the events of the summer and fall, 1964, Rev. Frederick D. Reese of the Dallas County Voters League lost confidence in the ability of SNCC to lead the movement effectively following the injunction of Circuit Court Judge James Hare. After a successful speech from The Reverend Dr. Martin

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<sup>158</sup> United States v. Clark, April 16, 1965.

<sup>159</sup> Garrow, 34.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

Luther King in Selma on October 15, the Rev. Reese and other members of The Courageous Eight made numerous overtures to SCLC leadership to have Dr. King launch a Selma campaign. They drafted a letter to invite Dr. King to come to Selma. The DCVL did not formally endorse the invitation but also did not formally order Rev. Reese to stop his discussions. Rev. C. T. Vivian told SCLC leaders in Atlanta that the time was right for a Selma campaign. As Thornton explains, SCLC leaders were impressed with “the dedication, enthusiasm, and optimistic eagerness for the struggle of the local black leaders of the Voters League.”<sup>161</sup> As amply documented, “the enthusiastic cooperation offered by the Voters League was essential to the campaign’s effectiveness.”<sup>162</sup>

Thus, “the Courageous Eight began negotiating with the SCLC in late 1964 to come to Selma in the beginning of 1965. SCLC did not have a chapter in Selma” and consequently “proposed that the Dallas County Voters League be incorporated into the SCLC. This unification would legitimize the presence of the King organization in Selma since there was no SCLC chapter in the town.”<sup>163</sup> The two groups shared offices at 500-508 First Avenue, a physical symbol of this union between the on-the-ground local organization (the DCVL) and the nationally recognized civil rights leader (SCLC). Many members of the Dallas County Voters League opposed being merged into the larger, national organization but Rev. Reese, supported by James Gildersleeve (aligned with Trinity Lutheran Church and the Alabama Lutheran College) and insurance agent Ernest Doyle made a command decision and Dr. Reese signed the agreement.<sup>164</sup>

As the DCVL and SCLC moved toward an alliance, new Mayor Joe Smitherman took office and merely promised: “I will discuss conditions with legitimate representatives of the Selma Negro community who can speak with authority for their race on occasions when it can serve some worthwhile purpose for me to do so.”<sup>165</sup> Smitherman’s pronouncement disappointed both white and black moderates, an attitude that did not improve even once the mayor agreed to meet with moderate blacks on November 6, 1964. Moderates, however, did approve of the mayor’s appointment of Wilson Baker as the new director of public safety. Wilson from his city hall office began to immediately tone down the police’s policy of violence and confrontation. Wilson took no action when blacks integrated the town’s restaurants on January 18, 1965.<sup>166</sup>

By the end of 1964, the two most effective Civil Rights organizations, SNCC and SCLC looked to bring the movement to Selma. SCLC leaders were afraid that a major effort in Selma might upset their compatriots at SNCC who had done so much there already. John Lewis, then chairman of SNCC, was also on the SCLC’s board, but understood that there was tension between the two groups. His memoir describes the steady tension between the various civil rights groups, who shared a cause but saw different

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 477.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 479.

<sup>163</sup> Wally G. Vaughn, ed., *The Selma Campaign, 1963-1965: The Decisive Battle of the Civil Rights Movement* (Dover, MA: The Majority Press, 2006), 220.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Quoted in Thornton, 467.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 469.

means of getting there, and consequently struggled over a limited pool of finances and media attention. A later March 1965 report from SNCC described the differences:

We have a number of differences with SCLC, however, that we have to deal with. One of these is that SNCC is demanding a voter registration test with no literacy requirement. SCLC is not pushing hard for that yet. Another difference we have with SCLC is that we support the idea of local people writing their own voting bill, submitting it to Congress, and lobbying for it; while SCLC opposes that idea. A third difference is that we support the idea of an FDP — a third party in Alabama, while SCLC would rather see Negroes registered and the channeled into either the Democratic or Republican Parties. A fourth difference is that SCLC pushes the idea that local people need leaders like Martin Luther King, and Rev. Abernathy, and others, while SNCC says that local people build their own leaders, out of their own communities — that they build their own self-confidence by doing this. Whether or not we will be able to work out these and other differences with SCLC remains to be seen.<sup>167</sup>

Ultimately, SNCC agreed to work with SCLC because the local leaders in Selma wanted them involved, and it was decided that it was their call, as it was their struggle. The difference between the organizations was smoothed somewhat by the overlap in leadership. Diane Nash, James Bevel, and Bernard Lafayette were all original SNCC people who had gone to work for SCLC, and of course Lewis himself had a foot in both camps.<sup>168</sup>

On December 28, 1964, Dr. King and the SCLC staff began planning for a mass meeting on January 2, 1965 to challenge the July 9 injunction by Judge Hare. The ministers at Tabernacle Baptist Church, First Baptist Church, and Brown Chapel AME Church all agreed to be hosts.; here is where crucial support for the campaign was gained and committed. Then on January 2, 1965 at Brown Chapel AME Church, Dr. King and Rev. Abernathy spoke to an estimated 700 people, and this meeting launched the SCLC voting rights drive in Selma. After the meeting, King and other SCLC leaders met at Amelia Boynton's house on Lapsley Avenue to review the result and discuss next steps. Dr. King then retired to the Jacksons' home, a couple of blocks away on Lapsley Avenue. This unassuming bungalow became his personal headquarters for the remainder of the Selma campaign.<sup>169</sup> But other homes in town also served as temporary headquarters for various activists. James Bevel, for example, stayed with the West family at Carver homes and Rachel West Nelson recalled of the night of January 18 that Bevel and others arrived: "there weren't enough chairs in the kitchen or the living room and people were sitting on the floor, drinking coffee and talking."<sup>170</sup> John

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<sup>167</sup> SNCC report, March 1965.

<sup>168</sup> Greenberg, 97.

<sup>169</sup> Richie Jean Sherrod Jackson, *The House by the Side of the Road: the Selma Civil Rights Movement* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2011).

<sup>170</sup> Sheyann Webb and Rachel West Nelson, *Selma, Lord, Selma* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1980), 22.

Lewis later remarked that the families of Carver homes “were the face of the civil rights movement, these unidentified men and women with no titles in front of their names, no Ph.D.s after them.” He added: “that’s where most of our SNCC people stayed, in Carver.”<sup>171</sup>

Over the next few days, SCLC and SNCC fieldworkers, including Nash, Bevel, and Lafayette, walked the neighborhoods of black Selma, encouraging strong community participation. They particularly connected with teenagers and young adults, and a youth rally on January 8 met with great success. The involvement of the Selma youth in the voting rights movement would become particularly significant in 1965 when the marches began. SNCC and SCLC activists organized their door-to-door efforts by wards and used students by the dozens to help recruit and support their efforts.<sup>172</sup> Students often marched alongside their elders, and the account of the struggle by Sheyann Webb and Rachel West Nelson, who were eight and nine respectively at the time, in *Selma, Lord, Selma* gained a great deal of popular attention when it was published in 1980. The students of R.B. Hudson High School were key to the progress of the movement.<sup>173</sup>

Sheriff Jim Clark took his first aggressive steps to derail the Selma campaign on January 7 when he and his deputies entered a mass meeting at Brown Chapel AME Church and disrupted its proceedings. A week later, Dr. King again addressed a large crowd of 800 at First Baptist Church and announced that it was also time to force the issue on the integration of public accommodations as mandated in the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The following day the march to the courthouse left from Brown Chapel, with some 400 in attendance. Downtown restaurants also were desegregated and that evening Dr. King registered as a guest at the Hotel Albert (not extant) where a professed American Nazi struck him; the city police arrested the Nazi.<sup>174</sup>

January witnessed a series of events and confrontations between demonstrators, prospective voters, and the sheriff’s department (which had jurisdiction of the courthouse grounds) and violence and national headline coverage of the events ensued. One event, which involved only about 105 voters who gathered at Clark Elementary School (extant) before walking to the courthouse, was of special importance. Dr. Frederick R. Reese, the minister at Ebenezer Baptist Church and officer of the Dallas County Voters League, was also a public school teacher. He convinced over 100 of his fellow educators to publicly make a statement by trying to register; each teacher must have known that by participating the school board would likely dismiss them. The teachers gathered at Clark Elementary on Lawrence Street before walking quietly on the sidewalks to the courthouse. Sheriff Clark and his deputies refused to allow the teachers to register and they next walked to Brown Chapel AME Church for a community meeting. John Lewis remembered: “it was a big day forward for all of us.”<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> John Lewis, *Walking with the Wind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998), 307 and 317.

<sup>172</sup> Interview with Louretta Wimberly, Selma, September 26, 2012.

<sup>173</sup> Audience comment, Selma Civil Rights landmarks public meeting, First Baptist Church, April 2012, especially comments from JoAnn Bland and Louretta Wimberly.

<sup>174</sup> “Positions Cited by Restaurants in Rights Case,” *Selma Times-Journal*, January 19, 1965.

<sup>175</sup> Lewis, 311.

Dr. King telegraphed Reese: "The protest of Dallas County teachers carried us miles down the road in the protest of injustices and at the same time up the road to the 'Great Society'. Most important, however, is the fact that you have destroyed the often made charge that teachers as a professional group is afraid to fight injustice. People all over the country are today standing on their feet applauding your action."<sup>176</sup> As a further sign of support, Dr. King spoke at mass meetings at two different churches that evening. And other professional groups soon followed suit—the morticians, then the barbers.<sup>177</sup>

On January 23, Federal Judge Daniel Thomas ordered Dallas County officials to allow African Americans to register, even designating how quickly the process should take place and ordering that at least 100 prospective voters should be registered each day. Local officials interpreted that ruling as meaning that only 100 voters could appear in line to register, that they could keep their methods of sidewalk and street control in place, and any prospective voter over that number could be arrested.<sup>178</sup> When one demonstrator, Annie Lee Cooper, fought back against the harassment, Sheriff Jim Clark beat her with a nightstick, an image flashed by newspapers through the country. At a mass meeting at Tabernacle Baptist Church James Bevel and Rev. Louis L. Anderson spoke to the courage of Cooper before Dr. King took the pulpit followed finally by Rev. Ralph Abernathy who told the crowd: "They are against us because we are black. They are against us because they don't want us to vote."<sup>179</sup>

On February 1, Dr. King and Rev. Abernathy led a demonstration to celebrate the anniversary of the Greensboro, North Carolina, sit-ins but also as a deliberate attempt to goad Sheriff Clark into the arrest of King. It worked: King was arrested and sent to the Selma jail. Over that day and the next hundreds of Selma children also marched, and were arrested. On the 4<sup>th</sup> President Lyndon B. Johnson complained about the failure of county officials to allow for African American registration. Malcolm X spoke to SNCC workers at Brown Chapel AME Church and told them that from his perspective the calls for nonviolence were a strategy for modern day Uncle Toms; he urged them to press the matter with all necessary means. His address was politely received but few locals were excited by the address.<sup>180</sup> The following day, Dr. King's "Letter from a Selma Jail" appeared in the February 5, 1965 issue of the *New York Times*. King asserted that "by jailing hundreds of Negroes, the city of Selma, Alabama, has revealed the persisting ugliness of segregation to the nation and to the world."<sup>181</sup>

With increasing calls for moderation coming from influential segments of Selma's white leadership, and the heightened federal involvement in solving the Selma issue, it is surprising to consider that only a month stood between the events of early February and Bloody Sunday of March 7, 1965. Sheriff Jim Clark and his inability to handle the

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<sup>176</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr to Reverend F. D. Reece, January 11, 1964, telegram, King Center Archives, digital collection.

<sup>177</sup> Branch, 564.

<sup>178</sup> Garrow, 44-45.

<sup>179</sup> Abernathy quoted in Branch, 567.

<sup>180</sup> Lewis, 313.

<sup>181</sup> Garrow, 48-52; *New York Times*, February 5, 1965.

situation is largely the answer. One of his biggest mistakes was his response to a demonstration held by about 120 students on February 10. Clark and his deputies stopped the march, arrested the children, but then led them on a forced march (some called it a forced run since the Sheriff and his deputies escorted the group in cars forcing them to trot or run to keep up) to a temporary camp well outside of Selma. Historian J. Mills Thornton concluded: “the forced march enraged the black community and appalled white moderates as well.”<sup>182</sup> Attorney J. L. Chestnut recalled “Every time Sheriff Clark went to extremes—shoved Mrs. Boynton, used cattle prods on children—more local blacks said, ‘That’s it. I’m marching.’”<sup>183</sup> John Lewis told local newspapers and radio: “Sheriff Jim Clark proved today beyond a shadow of a doubt that he is basically no different from a Gestapo officer during the Fascist slaughter of the Jews.”<sup>184</sup> The extreme reactions also compelled an increasing number of white ministers to come to Selma. Jonathan Daniels, an Episcopal seminarian from New Hampshire, came in February and stayed with the West family at Carver homes; another who stayed there was Presbyterian minister Samuel Morris.<sup>185</sup>

As Chestnut noted, the marchers were now energized. On February 15, an estimated 1500 demonstrators marched and a new level of commitment unified the African American community. After leading a group of voters along the streets and sidewalks to the courthouse, Rev. C. T. Vivian denounced Clark as being another Hitler; he was arrested. On February 17 Frederick D. Reese of the DCVL called for a renewed black boycott of white businesses. Then on February 18, at a demonstration in nearby Perry County, a white state trooper shot Jimmie Lee Jackson. Horribly wounded, Jackson was soon transferred to Good Samaritan Hospital in Selma for treatment. Colonel Albert Lingo of the state patrol came to the hospital to deliver an arrest warrant to Jackson for Jackson’s actions in Perry County.<sup>186</sup> Despite best efforts, Jackson died there on February 26, 1965.<sup>187</sup> Sister Barbara Lumm recalled that Jackson told her: “Sister, don’t you think this is a high price to pay for freedom?”<sup>188</sup> “Killing Jimmie Jackson just made things that much worse and made us all just that much more determined,” recalled Albert Turner. “And really when I started that day, I was a bricklayer at the time, and I had no intention of actually going into what we call the Civil Rights Movement . . . But the way in which we were treated that day gave me no other choice but to go back.”<sup>189</sup>

Rev. James Bevel a few days later at a Brown Chapel AME church mass meeting told the community to be ready to march to Montgomery to ask Governor George Wallace for redress and to honor the sacrifice made by activists like Jackson. Bevel and Bernard Lafayette had launched the strategy of marching in mass across the countryside along U.S. 80 to arrive at the statehouse steps and Dr. King agreed to the

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<sup>182</sup> Thornton, 485.

<sup>183</sup> Chestnut and Cass, 199.

<sup>184</sup> Lewis, 315.

<sup>185</sup> Webb and Nelson, 53.

<sup>186</sup> Branch, 597.

<sup>187</sup> Thornton, 486-487; Garrow, 60-68.

<sup>188</sup> Koehlinger, 165.

<sup>189</sup> Turner quoted in Howell Raines, *My Soul Is Rested* (New York: Penguin, 1977), 194.

strategy of a “March to Montgomery.” State officials gathered in Montgomery to plan the official government response: it was to let them march but without hope of resupply or reserves since all traffic along the road would be blocked, in the alleged interest of public safety. Bill Jones, Governor Wallace’s press secretary, recalled “I did not believe—nor did any of us who were present—that King and his fellow travelers could march the 50 miles to Montgomery. I firmly believed my plan would make them the laughing stock of the nation and win for us a propaganda battle.”<sup>190</sup>

But then on March 6, Saturday, Governor Wallace changed his mind and prohibited the march, a decision that meant both Dallas County sheriff deputies and state troopers would face off against the demonstrators. That same day, Selma came close to violence when a group of 60 white ministers, organized by Birmingham Lutheran minister Joseph Ellwanger (his father had once headed Alabama Lutheran Academy--now Concordia College)—marched on the sidewalks to the Dallas County Courthouse, having first organized their group at the Reformed Presbyterian Church.<sup>191</sup> Rev. L. James Rongstad of St. John’s Lutheran Church had gone to Reformed Presbyterian trying to stop the demonstrators. “The clear message to Ellwanger,” according to historian Taylor Branch, “was that he should not ‘go native’ beyond the missionary boundaries of the Lutheran Church, lest he endanger the Negroes themselves and repudiate his own father’s tradition of religious service.”<sup>192</sup> Once at the courthouse, the ministers never had much of an opportunity to present their protest. A group of whites, estimated at 500, threatened the ministers but were stopped by the local police.

Thus, on Sunday March 7, the protagonists gathered in different parts of Selma. The 600 African American demonstrators planned to gather at the Carver Homes playground, where a portion of the original playground concrete surface is extant<sup>193</sup>, as well as behind, around, and in Brown Chapel AME Church before beginning the march, led by SNCC activist John Lewis (SNCC as an organization did not endorse the march) and SCLC leader Hosea Williams. The troopers waited at the other side of the Edmund Pettus Bridge (extant, NHL): they had no city support since Public Safety chief Wilson Baker did not trust Sheriff Clark nor the state troopers and feared a violent reaction that would do great damage to the city’s image and reputation. Unfortunately, Baker’s nightmarish vision became true. Once the first of the marchers had crossed the bridge in the early afternoon, Major John Cloud ordered them to disperse, gave them two minutes, and then when that time had passed, he ordered the armed troopers to advance. The civil rights movement riot (a riot only by the white law enforcement officials) known as “Bloody Sunday” was underway.<sup>194</sup>

J. L. Chesnut left a graphic account:

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<sup>190</sup> Quoted in Garrow, 68.

<sup>191</sup> “Massive Disorder Averted Here When Officers Intervene,” *Selma Times-Journal*, March 7, 1965.

<sup>192</sup> Taylor Branch, *On Canaan’s Edge: America in the King Years, 1965-1968* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006), 35.

<sup>193</sup> JoAnne Bland has related to the author that a portion of the original concrete at the playground where the marchers organized is extant, 2012.

<sup>194</sup> Garrow, 68-75.

It was the worse day of my life. I did not believe America could ever be saved. I saw a sea of law enforcement officers, at least 200, on the other side of the Edmund Pettus Bridge. They were arguing over who was in charge. I saw Marie Foster, John Lewis and others crest the bridge. They came face to face with the might of Alabama stretched out across the 4-lane highway. Suddenly a white voice barked out, "Turn around. Go back to your church. This is as far as you will be permitted to go!" John Lewis kneeled as if to pray. The others behind him began to do likewise. From somewhere in the cluster of law enforcement, a tear gas canister hit the pavement and exploded. In that moment there was absolute bedlam. It was worse than the war and I was a veteran. I saw grown men on horse back wielding Billy clubs the size of baseball bats and splitting the heads of women and children like they were watermelons. One could hear ribs cracking as horses trampled on their bodies.<sup>195</sup>

It was no contest; the deputies and troopers violently broke through the demonstrators, clubbing and arresting many but then chasing others through the downtown streets and sidewalks as the marchers fled toward the safety of their churches and neighborhoods. Willie Bolden remembered: "they literally whipped folk all the way back to the church. They even came up in the yard of the church, hittin' on folk. Ladies, men, babies, children—they didn't give a damn who they were."<sup>196</sup>

The whites surrounded the neighborhood between First Baptist Church, Carver homes, and Brown Chapel AME church, creating a human cordon to restrain blacks within that neighborhood. Wilson Baker recalled with disgust how Clark's posse on their horses could not be restrained and how the violence almost escalated: "People were coming out of those houses with shotguns and rifles and pistols, and the horses were running in there, they were trying to ride horses up on the steps of the church and everyplace else. [SCLC leader Andrew] Young, he played such an important part of saving a bloodbath. He was just running wild up and down to these apartment units: 'Get back into the house with this weapon . . . We're not going to have any weapons out.'<sup>197</sup> The wounded went to Good Samaritan Hospital, First Baptist Church, Burwell Infirmary, and the Brown Chapel AME parsonage for treatment and assistance. The hospital alone handled about 50 to 60 (some accounts listed more) people injured in the attack.<sup>198</sup> That night, however, the wounded and hundreds more gathered at Brown Chapel. John Lewis recalls speaking but did so with double-vision from the beating he took.<sup>199</sup> Dr. King, speaking from Atlanta, announced he would lead a renewed march two days later, on March 9. He asked for ministers of all faiths to join him and added "in the vicious maltreatment of defenseless citizens of Selma, where old women and young children

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<sup>195</sup> J. L. Chesnut account, cited in Foot Soldiers for the Right to Vote in Alabama website, [www.scribd.com/doc/190447236/](http://www.scribd.com/doc/190447236/).

<sup>196</sup> Bolden quoted in Raines, 210.

<sup>197</sup> Baker quoted in *ibid.*, 202-203.

<sup>198</sup> Garrow, 75-76.

<sup>199</sup> Lewis quoted in Raines, 212; Lewis, 330.

were gassed and clubbed at random, we have witnessed an eruption of the disease of racism which seeks to destroy all America. No American is without responsibility.”<sup>200</sup>

The viciousness of the attack surprised no African Americans in Selma, but it shocked a nation. Perhaps John Lewis best summarizes the reaction:

But something about that day in Selma touched a nerve deeper than anything that had come before. Maybe it was the concentrated focus of the scene, the mass movement of those troopers on foot and riders on horseback rolling into and over two long lines of stoic, silent, unarmed people. . . This was a face-off in the most vivid terms between a dignified, composed, completely nonviolent multitude of silent protestors and the truly malevolent force of a heavily armed, hateful battalion of troopers. The sight of them rolling over us like human tanks was something that had never been seen before.<sup>201</sup>

The brutality on the bridge spurred hundreds of Americans to react. As Taylor Branch has observed, “the rout on Pettus Bridge ignited a week of passionate struggle about fundamental and historic issues. Would the pent-up conflict about Negro voting rights be settled in the streets, the courts, the legislatures, or not at all, and would results favor the primacy or subordination of the states?”<sup>202</sup> Answering Dr. King’s call, white and black ministers from near and far came to Selma. American labor stepped up in greater numbers as members of the AFL-CIO and other organizations came to Selma. The sisters at Good Samaritan Hospital provided lodging and support for scores of their fellow sisters who came to the town. Both SNCC and SCLC activists wondered if a successful demonstration could be pulled off so quickly and they met for hours at Dr. Sullivan Jackson’s house on Lapsley Avenue. The Johnson administration wanted the march postponed and administration officials attended the meeting at the Jackson’s house but the activists at Selma decided now was the time. The administration officials next met with Sheriff Clark and Colonel Albert Lingo of the state police who clearly stated that they would stop the marchers with force again. Then the administration negotiators asked, what if the demonstrators stopped at the bridge and turned around. The sheriff and colonel replied that no violence would ensue. The administration then relayed that to Dr. King and SCLC officials. “Turnaround Tuesday” was mere hours away.

Some 2,000 black and white demonstrators, led by Dr. King, left Brown Chapel AME Church in the mid-afternoon. They were read a federal injunction forbidding the march to Montgomery but King led the marchers over the crest of the bridge where, on the other side, they saw another massing of white law enforcement agents. King led the group to within 50 yards of the troopers, stopped, gave prayers, sang “We Shall Overcome,” and then turned around and headed back to the churches. The public theater of the afternoon angered many SNCC activists and Selma youth—they wanted

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<sup>200</sup> Charles Fager, *Selma 1965* (New York: Scribner’s, 1974), 97-98.

<sup>201</sup> Lewis, 331.

<sup>202</sup> Branch, *On Canaan’s Edge*, 58.

to push on to Montgomery.<sup>203</sup> Amelia Pitts Boynton saw it differently: “Selma African-Americans had scored a technical victory and saved face by staging the march. . . There was another cause for rejoicing—the marches meant more to the African-Americans and whites alike in Selma and in the whole state, for that matter, than anyone will ever be able to evaluate. It made the African-American realize that people cared and thousands or perhaps millions of white people in the upper class financially had meek and humble hearts.”<sup>204</sup> One of the new supporters was Richard D. Leonard of the Community Church of New York who came to Selma with three other church members to help where they could. They arrived Monday night, were lodged in a private home at the Carver Homes, and were impressed when the next day dawned and members of Green Street Baptist Church had prepared breakfast in their educational wing for all of the demonstrators gathering in the town. Leonard noted that the Green Street Baptist congregation was constantly busy preparing meals for the activists.<sup>205</sup>

That evening SCLC leader Rev. Ralph Abernathy announced that Wednesday would see another march to the Dallas County Courthouse, this one accompanied by many of the white ministers who had arrived in Selma in response to Dr. King’s call. Unfortunately, violence also returned that evening when a group of whites beat Rev. James Reeb and two other ministers outside of the Silver Moon Café. Two days later Reeb died from the beating. In the meanwhile the planned March 10 demonstration to the courthouse in memory of Rev. Reeb, led by Rev. L. L. Anderson of Tabernacle Baptist Church with 500 marchers, did not occur on Wednesday since city officials decided to allow no marchers outside of the sealed off First Baptist Church to Carver Homes to Brown Chapel AME Church neighborhood. Public Safety chief Wilson Baker strung a clothesline across the street to mark the line that marchers could not cross and then placed police all around the corridor to enforce the boundary. Voting Rights activists equated the blockade to the Berlin Wall.<sup>206</sup>

The national significance of these days in Selma is measured not just by the events themselves but the intense national newspaper and television coverage. Also, sympathy marches in support of the Selma demonstrators took place in many American cities such as Boston, Chicago, New York City, Detroit, and Los Angeles. On March 15, Dr. King held a brief but powerful service in honor of Rev. Reeb and all who had sacrificed for the cause on the steps of the Dallas County Courthouse. Some 2000 marchers were involved; those near the front heard the messages of King, Episcopal Bishop John E. Hines, Greek Orthodox Archbishop Lakovos, and United Auto Workers president Walter P. Reuther, along with two Massachusetts congressmen. That evening, President Johnson delivered his famous “We Shall Overcome” speech to a joint session of Congress and announced the administration’s proposed Voting Rights Act to the national television audience estimated at some 70 million people. “At times history and fate meet at a single time in a single place to shape a turning point in man’s

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 68-73.

<sup>204</sup> Robinson, 259.

<sup>205</sup> Richard D. Leonard, *Call to Selma: Eighteen Days of Witness* (Boston: Skinner House Books, 2002), 10.

<sup>206</sup> Garrow, 90-92; Branch, *On Canaan’s Edge*, 83-84..

unending search for freedom,” Johnson proclaimed, “So it was last week in Selma, Alabama.”<sup>207</sup>

Judge Frank Johnson on March 16 ended the injunction against the march to Montgomery. The march was announced for Sunday, March 21. Over the next few days hundreds of demonstrators, black and white, filtered into the First Baptist Church-Carver-Homes- Brown Chapel AME church neighborhood. Sheyann Webb recalled: “our houses was full of people. They’d sleep in sleeping bags on the living-room floor, in the upstairs hallway, anywhere there was space. It was that way everywhere.”<sup>208</sup> On March 21, 1965, physicians gathered at First Baptist and examined the 300 marchers chosen to walk the entire route. Joined by hundreds and eventually thousands more, the march began after a mass meeting at Brown Chapel AME Church and ended on the steps of the state capitol on March 25. After the march, Viola Liuzzo of Detroit, who had come to Selma in support of the demonstrators, died on the highway at the hands of the Birmingham KKK Another Selma-associated white activist, Rev. Jonathan Daniels, was murdered in Hayneville, the adjacent county seat. On March 28, four African American youths and fifteen white activists desegregated services at the Episcopal church.<sup>209</sup>

Neither the march to Montgomery nor the Congressional approval of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 that summer ended the civil rights movement in Selma. The Dallas County Voters League immediately launched into the difficult work of getting African Americans on the voting rolls. J. L. Chestnut recalled: “Marie Foster and many other local and SCLC people went door-to-door throughout the county, telling their rights under the new law, motivating them to get registered. . . . People had been told and now believed they could become captains of their own destiny through the ballot.” By the end of the year, to Chestnut’s count, 9000 blacks had registered in the county.<sup>210</sup>

Chestnut also remembered, however, that the passage of federal legislation did not end intimidation over African American civil rights. That summer the school board dismissed Frederick D. Reese from his teaching job because he had missed so many days of work due to the demonstrations. Reese was eventually reinstated to his position as claims of embezzlement from the DCVL also were thrown out of court. In June 1965, the school board also took first, tiny steps toward school desegregation, planning and then adopting the “freedom of choice” plan that hundreds of southern schools were following in a feeble attempt to stop public school integration. The plan allowed a mere 20 black students to enter the first four grades; the junior high and high school remained segregated. But this proved too much for some parents and in reaction they withdrew from the public system and established the private John T. Morgan Academy.<sup>211</sup>

Then in 1966 Sheriff Jim Clark ran for re-election in the Democratic primary but was defeated by Wilson Baker, who received considerable African American support. Clark

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<sup>207</sup> Ibid., 100-107.

<sup>208</sup> Webb and Nelson, 123.

<sup>209</sup> “Rights Leaders Plan Ouster of George Wallace,” *Selma Times-Journal*, March 29, 1965.

<sup>210</sup> Chesnut and Cass, 234.

<sup>211</sup> Thornton, 492-498.

struck back in the general election, pledging, in a paid advertisement in the *Selma Times-Journal*, that I “will NEVER Be Overcome by Khrushchev, L.B.J., Katzenback, King or Baker. Nor any man quoting the Communist slogan, ‘we shall overcome.’”<sup>212</sup> After a disputed election went to federal judges, the court finally declared Baker the winner; African American votes provided the difference.

Voting rights did not magically solve the race divide or lingering bitterness over the changes brought on by the Civil Rights Movement. On February 16, 1968, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., returned to Selma to address a mass meeting at Tabernacle Baptist Church in support of his Poor People’s Campaign and its planned march on Washington. This time, no threats or armed law enforcement greeted him; an extensive set of photographs in the Alabama Division of Archives and History documents a huge crowd, extensive media, and whites in attendance. Historian Taylor Branch recorded that Dr. King told the crowd: “what a blessing it was to be met at the tiny airport by a black deputy sheriff instead of Jim Clark’s posse.”<sup>213</sup> Along with Tabernacle pastor Rev. L. L. Anderson, veterans of the Civil Rights Movement were there; King recognized Amelia Boynton, Marie Foster, and Rev. Lorenzo Harrison. Dr. King said: “We need another Selma and Birmingham to dramatize the economic plight of the poor.” But he also recognized that “it is much easier to integrate lunch counters than eradicate slums, much easier to guarantee the right to the vote than to guarantee an income.”<sup>214</sup>

In 1970, the federal government intervened more directly in the lagging issue of school desegregation and forced the desegregation of the school system, leading whites to create a second private school. The schools were finally desegregated in 1971.<sup>215</sup> Even the Dunn Nursing Home had been desegregated some four years earlier.<sup>216</sup> An article in the *Washington Post* on August 5, 1971, detailed how life had changed for Dr. Sullivan Jackson, whose home had served as Dr. King’s abode and headquarters during the winter and spring of 1965. Dr. Jackson had become the third black citizen to become a member of the Selma Chamber of Commerce.<sup>217</sup> That same year, the Catholic Bishop in Mobile combined the separate Catholic churches in Selma, creating one parish. Local officials now were ready to make agreements recognizing the new realities of life in Dallas County. The “Selma Accords of 1972,” facilitated largely by Father James Robinson of the Edmundites negotiating with African American leaders and city officials represented by Mayor Joe Smitherman, settled numerous lawsuits African Americans had filed since 1965 in an attempt to receive equitable treatment under federal programs and policies. Alston Fitts III explains: “Black leaders agreed to withdraw their lawsuits, which had been blocking Selma from receiving federal money for housing and internal improvements, in exchange for a greater role in administering the programs. The Accords made possible the city’s acquiring some \$3 million in federal

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<sup>212</sup> The Clark ad is reproduced in Chesnut and Cass, 237.

<sup>213</sup> Branch, *On Canaan’s Edge*, 695.

<sup>214</sup> Jean M. White, “King Revisits Scenes of Strife, Seeking Aid,” *Washington Post*, February 17, 1968.

<sup>215</sup> Thornton, 496-498.

<sup>216</sup> Robinson, 230.

<sup>217</sup> B.D. Colen, “Black Dentists Find a Middle-Class Life,” *Washington Post*, August 5, 1971.

funds to build houses, pave streets, and build sewers.”<sup>218</sup> The agreement signed on February 16, 1972, signaled a new era in the story of Selma’s civil rights history.<sup>219</sup> Another sign of the new era was the agreement that council members in Selma would be elected by districts and in 1972 the first elected African American members of council since Reconstruction—Rev. Frederick D. Reese, Rev. Lorenzo Harrison, William Kemp, J.C. Kimbrough, and Ernest Doyle—took their chairs.

## **Section F: Associated Property Types**

### Property Descriptions

In the initial planning for this multiple property submission, discussions took place between the City of Selma, the Alabama Black Heritage Council, the Alabama Historical Commission, the consultant, and many representatives from the Selma African American community including properties owners, Selma University, First Baptist Church, Green Street Baptist Church, Brown Chapel AME Church, Tabernacle Baptist Church, Ward Chapel AME Church, Second Baptist Church, Shiloh Baptist Church, Trinity Lutheran Church, Mt. Zion Primitive Baptist Church, and Little Canaan Primitive Baptist Church. This group met in Selma, at First Baptist Church, and discussed the potential major categories of property types for the multiple property submission. Louretta Wimberly of the Black Heritage Council significantly assisted the property assessment fieldwork.

Following the guidelines of the National Park Service in its theme study of school desegregation in the United States, and the earlier Multiple Property Submission for the Civil Rights Movement in Birmingham, the group has discussed what property types make the most sense to document and explain the Civil Rights Movement in Selma. The six recommendation categories are: strategy centers; conflict centers; resolution centers; properties associated with prominent persons; properties associated with community groups, ethnic organizations, and institutions; and historic districts.

1. Strategy Centers are properties, where prominent persons who represented local, state, or national institutions and organizations held meetings and strategy sessions both in support of, and in opposition to, the Civil Rights Movement. Both participants in and later historians of the Civil Rights Movement have likened the events in Dallas County, especially of 1963-1965, to a military campaign. Thus, properties where demonstrations, media events, speeches, fundraising campaigns, political reactions, violence, and legal challenges were discussed and planned are significant to understanding the complete story of Selma’s Civil Rights era. In Selma, these properties may embrace a neighborhood where Civil Rights activists were housed and kept safe, such as George Washington Carver Homes and a proposed neighborhood historic district from the 1300 to the 1600 blocks of Lapsley Avenue.

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<sup>218</sup> Alston Fitts III, “Edmundite Southern Missions,” Encyclopedia of Alabama online, accessed January 2013; also see Fitts, 160.

<sup>219</sup> *HUD Challenge*, vol.5-6(1972): 11; Fitts, 160-161.

Like in Birmingham, activist churches are of particular importance, since they served as physical safe havens for community discussions and meetings from the late nineteenth century to the late twentieth century (indeed, several continue that purpose to the present). The ministers and congregation leaders at these churches also played important roles as Civil Rights activists, as is evident in the 16 ministers named in the July 9, 1964 issued by Circuit Court Judge James Hare in an attempt to stop demonstrations in the city. Selma churches further held strategy meetings for their congregation members and other local residents on civil rights issues from the era of the imposition of Jim Crow to the years of greatest Civil Rights activism from 1962 to 1972. Brown Chapel AME Church (NHL), First Baptist Church (NHL), Tabernacle Baptist Church, and Green Street Baptist Church were key headquarters for SCLC and SNCC efforts in the winter and spring of 1965.

Other strategy centers include offices, public buildings, dwellings, and businesses that served as meeting places for significant discussions and planning for Civil Rights demonstrations and protests.

In the research for The Civil Rights Movement in Selma, 1865-1972, Multiple Property Submission (MPS), the following properties may be classified as Strategy Centers:

Brown Chapel AME Church, 410 Martin Luther King Street (NHL)  
 First Baptist Church, 709 Martin Luther King Street (NR)  
 Federal Building, 908 Alabama Ave (already listed but Civil Rights Movement significance needs to be added to the existing nomination)  
 Tabernacle Baptist Church, 1431 Broad Street  
 Green Street Baptist Church, 821 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue  
 Dallas County Courthouse (1959-60), 105 Lauderdale Street  
 Boynton House, 1315 Lapsley Avenue  
 Pollard-Brown House, 1609 Lapsley Avenue  
 Burwell-Dinkins House, 700 L.L. Anderson Avenue  
 West Trinity Baptist Church, 310 Anderson Street  
 Ward Chapel AME, 811 Philpot  
 Mt. Zion Primitive Baptist, 1306 Union Street  
 St. Paul CME Church, 808 Minter Avenue  
 Ebenezer Baptist Church, 1548 Legrande Street  
 Little Canaan Primitive Baptist Church, 1325 Eugene Street  
 Shiloh Missionary Baptist Church, 1416 Selma Avenue  
 Clinton Chapel AME Zion Church, 615 Green Street  
 Reformed Presbyterian Church, 627 Jeff Davis Avenue (already listed but Civil Rights Movement significance needs to be added to the existing nomination)  
 Trinity Lutheran Church (historic building), S. Division Street at Magazine Street  
 Sullivan Jackson House, 1416 Lapsley Avenue  
 Selma Public Safety Building, 1300 Alabama (already listed)  
 R.B. Hudson High School, 1701 Summerfield Road  
 Clark Elementary School, 405 Lawrence Street  
 St. Elizabeth Mission, Broad Street

George Washington Carver Homes, Martin Luther King Street  
 George and Jewell Wilson Building, 500-508 First Avenue  
 Wilson Community Center (already listed)  
 Selma Times-Journal Building, Water Street (already listed)  
 Selma University historic campus, 1501 Lapsley Avenue

2. Conflict Centers are properties associated with conflict or confrontation and include properties that were bombed and/or vandalized by groups in opposition to the Civil Rights Movement. Conflict Centers include offices, public buildings, churches, parks, private homes, neighborhoods, and businesses where actual physical conflict and/or demonstrations took place either in support of, or in opposition to, the Civil Rights Movement. These properties also include local, state, and federal buildings where legal and political conflict took place.

Dallas County Courthouse, 1959-60  
 Edmund Pettus Bridge (NHL)  
 Selma Public Library, historic (now Selma Chamber of Commerce)  
 Queen of Peace Catholic Church, 309 Washington  
 First Presbyterian Church  
 Memorial Stadium, 1949, 108 W. Dallas Avenue  
 George Washington Carver Homes  
 Brown Chapel AME Church (NHL)  
 First Baptist Church (NR)  
 Dunn Nursing Home

3. Reconciliation Centers are properties where meetings and activities took place that either sought solutions to Civil Rights strife or that served to memorialize and/or bring reconciliation to the activities of people, institutions, or events significant to the story of the Civil Rights Movement. These properties include offices, public buildings, cemeteries, churches, parks, private homes, and businesses

Good Samaritan Hospital, 1107 Voeglin Avenue  
 Selma University  
 Brown Chapel AME Church (NHL)  
 St. Elizabeth Mission  
 First Baptist Church (NR)  
 Tabernacle Baptist Church  
 Elmwood Cemetery, Race Street

4. Properties associated with prominent persons. These are people who are significantly involved as important leaders of significant organizations or agencies in the Civil Rights events in Selma. These organizations and agencies include the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee. The nominated properties are, as the NPS guidelines state, “most closely associated with a person’s productive life.” These properties include residences, churches, businesses, and public

buildings. The following properties have already been identified as being significantly associated with a significant person but more detailed work on this theme needs to be carried out:

Sullivan Jackson House, Lapsley Avenue  
 Sam and Amelia Boynton House, Lapsley Avenue  
 Tabernacle Baptist Church (Rev. L. L. Anderson)

5. Historic Districts are properties that share physical proximity and that are related by significant events, pattern of events, persons, and/or institutions and agencies to a significant degree that the themes of social history and African American ethnic identity related to the Civil Rights Movement are important associations with the historic district. This designation reflects the NPS definition of a district as “a significant concentration, linkage, or continuity of sites, buildings, structures, or objects united historically or aesthetically by plan or physical development.” The key consideration here is whether the buildings, sites, and structures are “united historically” more so than being united “aesthetically.” These districts may have architectural and aesthetic distinction, the most common criterion used in designating historic districts. But in this MPS, historic districts are defined by shared historical events, patterns of events, and/or institutional linkages related to the Civil Rights story rather than design considerations. This assessment of significance means that street patterns and historic sidewalks are important elements since they formed corridors for demonstration marches, and are key components found in both the Martin Luther King Street Historic District and the Downtown Civil Rights Movement district described below.

In defining a historic district significantly related to the Civil Rights Movement in Selma, a particularly important question, as NPS guidelines state, is how “significant individuals or events contributed to the development of the district.” It must be a property where important people and institutions carried out significant activities directly linked to the Civil Rights Movement, where strategy centers, conflict centers, resolution centers, and institutions associated with key individuals and/or key community and ethnic groups exist in historical relationship to each other. The district designations also depend on property owner support. Potential historic districts include:

Lapsley Street Historic District, from Boynton Home to intersection with First Avenue. This area contains various homes and stores significantly associated with the events of 1950s-1960s—strategy center, conflict center, and reconciliation center)

Martin Luther King Street Historic District, including First Baptist Church, Carver Homes, and Brown Chapel AME church.

Downtown Civil Rights Movement District, which could include the Dallas County Courthouse, historic public library, Federal Building, and the block of Water Street that housed the Selma Times-Journal offices and the Selma White Citizens’ Council office.

Additional survey and research will identify other potential districts related to Selma's Civil Rights Movement history.

Outbuildings are present on many of these potential properties and typically include unadorned, functional buildings such as storage sheds, garages, and recreational facilities and/or structures. Outbuildings may be considered contributing buildings and/or structures to the nomination if they date to the property's period of significance and possess integrity.

#### Registration Requirements:

The listed property types are most often eligible under Criterion A under the themes of Ethnic Heritage: Black, Social History, and Law. To meet Criterion A eligibility, the property must be directly associated with significant historical events and/or pattern of events in the Civil Rights Movement history of Selma and it must have been in existence at the time that the historical event occurred.

To meet Criterion B eligibility, the property must be associated with a prominent person in the Civil Rights Movement history of Selma and the property must be associated with that person during their period of significance in the Civil Rights Movement. It should also be the primary property associated with the individual and his/her period of significance in the Civil Rights movement. Prominent ministers, political leaders, DCVL leaders, NAACP leaders, SCLC leaders, and leading community activists are the most likely subjects for Criterion B significance.

The primary properties "most closely associated" with a significant person's productive life may no longer exist. The only remaining properties associated with significant individuals may be their private residences. If these dwellings do not meet the definitions of Strategy Centers and Conflict Centers, it is doubtful that the residences would be eligible solely as the private home of a significant individual.

As an example, the Boynton and Jackson homes are both associated with significant individuals but both dwellings also served as strategy centers in the 1960s. Another example is the Benjamin Turner monument in the Old Live Oak Cemetery on Dallas Avenue. The cemetery monument is the only extant resource that survives that is directly associated with the life of Turner, who was a prominent African American civil rights leader in the Reconstruction era.

Particular caution must be taken with Criterion B nominations for people who are still living. It may be difficult to discern the most significant segment of their overall career if that career still continues. That caution is particularly important for individuals who gained a significant role in the last phase (1962 to 1972) of the Civil Rights Movement. Many of the key individuals of the 1950s to 1963 period have died and their significance to the Civil Rights Movement can be fully assessed. However, a handful of activists of the 1950s still survive today; their contribution to the Civil Rights Movement should be assessed as being of extraordinary significance to the events and institutions of the Civil

Rights Movement for the Criterion B nomination to proceed.

To meet Criterion C eligibility, the property must possess significance in architecture, craftsmanship, and/or art. This MPS does not focus on the architectural qualities of the five property types but recognizes that many of the properties, especially churches and public buildings, possess architectural merit and may be eligible for listing in the National Register under Criterion C.

### Period of Significance

Five distinct periods of significance in the Civil Rights Movement history of Selma have been identified:

1. Emancipation, Reconstruction and the roots of the Civil Rights Movement, 1863-1900
2. Strengthening African American Bonds of Community in a Jim Crow era, 1900-1940
3. Civil Rights in a Cold War Era, 1940-1954
4. Massive Resistance in Wake of Brown v. Board of Education, 1954-1962
5. The Push for Voting Rights, 1962-1972

The period of significance begins with Civil Rights events related to the Reconstruction era because during these years of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Selma African-Americans established many of the key institutions, schools and churches, that would serve as cultural infrastructure for the Civil Rights Movement of the twentieth century. The period of significance ends with the full desegregation of public schools in 1971 and the approval of the Selma Accords of 1972, which ended legal conflicts and paved the way for more collaboration between whites and blacks in Selma.

Properties that attain significance within the last fifty years must meet the test of “extraordinary significance” in order to be listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Historians, however, long ago reached consensus on the extraordinary pivotal importance of the Civil Rights Movement in the South, and particularly the nationally famous events and people involved in the Selma Civil Rights Movement. Moreover, the National Park Service’s recent theme study on school desegregation in the United States recognizes the significance of events, patterns of events, and people up to the year 1974.

### Assessments of Integrity

Properties may meet registration requirements if they possess sufficient character and integrity to retain their sense of time and place from their period of significance. In the case of Civil Rights Movement-associated properties in Selma, traditional tests of

architectural integrity may prove wanting as the mere process of ending and transforming the dominant culture's landscape of segregation logically led to properties experiencing change as they became part of an integrated landscape in the city. To search out merely the properties that remained exactly as they were in 1965, for example, would deny the agency of African Americans as they gained political and economic power, and assumed a new legitimacy and visibility in southern culture, as they translated the immediate success of the Civil Rights Movement into new social, cultural, and political arrangements and environments in the mid-1960s to mid-1970s. However, if the property lacks the significant distinguishing features from its period of significance, no matter how just and well intentioned those renovations may be, the property no longer possesses integrity for that period of significance.

Particularly valuable questions to raise about the integrity of property types in this nomination are:

Location. Is the property situated on its historic lot from its period of significance?

Association. Is the property located at the place of its initial construction?

Setting. Is the historic setting of the property intact? Do substantial modern intrusions, such as highways, commercial development, and modern outbuildings, sites, and structures exist? Are these intrusions located on the property or on immediate adjacent property? Are the modern intrusions so distracting that they lessen, or eliminate, the sense of time and place conveyed by the historic property?

For districts, additional important questions are: "how have intrusions and noncontributing structures and buildings affected the district's ability to convey a sense of significance" and do the "physical features and characteristics that distinguish" the district still exist?

Feeling. Does the property and its lot retain an ability to convey a sense of time and place from its period of significance? Has this feeling been compromised by new and/or incompatible adjacent property use or construction?

Again, with districts, consideration should be given to the impact of intrusions and non-contributing structures and buildings. Can a sense of significance still be conveyed by the district as a whole?

Design. Are the design qualities—as represented by its distinguishing significant architectural elements and features—from the property's period of significance still extant and apparent?

This question is sometimes difficult to assess because of the past impact of race and poverty on African-American properties. In the case of the many African-American churches considered in this nomination, it is a particularly thorny question. Due to the nature of church buildings serving congregations whose needs and abilities change

over time, most church buildings will exhibit some change from their period of initial construction and occupation. This rate of change also was directly affected by issues of race in the Jim Crow era, which existed throughout the state until the mid-1960s. When assessing National Register eligibility, therefore, it is important to take into account the impact of segregation codes on buildings that existed prior to 1965. Integrity will be retained if these adaptations belong to the church's period of significance and do not overwhelm the initial construction, design, and style of the building to the degree that the building loses its integrity of feeling, design, materials, and workmanship of its period of significance.

Materials. As much as possible, historic properties should retain their original building materials to their period of significance. Does the building display its original construction materials? How much original material has been lost? How much has been retained? When and why did these alterations take place? Were the changes within the period of significance and associated with the building's thematic significance?

Workmanship. As much as possible, historic properties should retain their construction techniques and overall form and plan for their period of significance. How much of the original workmanship and building plan survive? When and why did these alterations take place? Were the changes within the period of significance and associated with the building's thematic significance?

## **G. Geographical Data**

The survey for this project included property within the incorporated city limits of the City of Selma, Alabama.

## **H. Summary of Identification and Evaluation Methods**

The consultant has consulted repeatedly in 2012 to 2013 with representatives of the Alabama Historical Commission, the Alabama Black Heritage Council, the City of Selma, and many interested individuals and institutions, especially the historic African American churches of Selma. Louretta Wimberly of Selma and the Alabama Black Heritage Council have met with the consultant repeatedly and have been invaluable sources of information and interviews. Another important local source was George Wilson and his research on SNCC in Selma in the mid-1960s. The city provided copies of an earlier 2000 inventory of African American properties in Selma, prepared for the city and for the Alabama Historical Commission. A public meeting that defined the general strategy of the project and 21 potential properties took place at First Baptist Church in April 2012. Multiple field visits to properties took place throughout 2012, with the valuable assistance of the Alabama Black Heritage Council. A full draft of the MPS was submitted to the Alabama Black Heritage Council and the Alabama Historical Commission for comment and then revision in February 2013.

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The most comprehensive published bibliography on Selma's Civil Rights Movement will be found in David Garrow's *Protest at Selma* (1978); Taylor Branch's *Pillar of Fire: America in the King Years, 1963-1965* (1998) and *On Canaan's Edge: America in the King Years, 1965-1968* (2007); and J. Mills Thornton's *Dividing Lines* (2002). This listing compiles major secondary sources used in the preparation of the MPS; it is not a comprehensive listing of sources published on the topic or used in this report.

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