

# Bloody Sunday

## Pre-reading

Questions: What is Bloody Sunday? Where did it happen? Why did it happen?

Definitions: Demonstration – a public activity in support of or against a specific cause

State trooper – a state police officer

Segregation – the act of separating one racial group from another



Federal Bureau of Investigation  
Photograph

## Reading

On Sunday, March 7, 1965 over 500 people started a planned march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama. It began as a peaceful demonstration. Suddenly, things changed. When state troopers met the demonstrators at the edge of the city, that day became known as “Bloody Sunday.”

The 1960’s was a time of great unrest in our country, especially in the southern United States. The civil rights era mobilized many to be a voice for justice and equality for all people, no matter what their skin color.

Many Black Americans faced barriers that either prevented or made it difficult for them to register to vote. In Selma, Black Americans made up almost half the population, but only two percent were registered voters. The demonstrators marched to demand fairness in voter registration.

John Lewis was a key organizer of the march. The 25 year old son of a sharecropper was the leader of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. This group was dedicated to ending segregation and registering black voters.

Civil rights groups such as Lewis’s practiced nonviolence. He and other leaders asked the demonstrators to not fight back against anyone who committed violence against them during the peaceful protest.

What did the marchers do when the heavily armed state troopers confronted them? They paused for a moment, and then kept walking. The sheriff warned the people they had two minutes to break up the march. The deputies did not wait. They attacked sooner.

The marchers were tear-gassed, spat on and clubbed. They were whipped, trampled by horses and jeered by others for demanding the right to register to vote. Television and newspapers carried pictures of the event that became known as “Bloody Sunday.”

The images sickened and outraged people throughout the country. Within 48 hours, demonstrations in support of the marchers were held in 80 cities. Many of the nation’s religious leaders, including Martin Luther King Jr., flew to Selma. King helped finish what Lewis had begun. He led a peaceful march from Selma to Montgomery.

Congress responded to these events by enacting the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The Act states that no person shall be denied the right to vote because of race or color.

John Lewis went on to serve as Director of the Voter Education Project (VEP), a program that added nearly four million voters to the voter rolls. Today he is a U.S. Congressman.

Source: America’s Story from America’s Library – Library of Congress

Level 7.5

## Understanding

1. Why was the march held? \_\_\_\_\_  
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2. Who was the leader of the event? How has he continued his political work? \_\_\_\_\_  
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3. What is a **protest**? \_\_\_\_\_  
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4. What type of protests did many civil rights groups practice? \_\_\_\_\_  
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5. How did people in the U.S. respond to the Bloody Sunday event? \_\_\_\_\_  
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6. How did the march promote change? \_\_\_\_\_  
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7. What famous civil rights leader led the final march from Selma? \_\_\_\_\_  
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## Writing

Option A: Summarize the reading in your own words.

Option B: What is your reaction to Bloody Sunday?

Option C: Have you ever been a part of a protest? If, yes write about it. What was the cause? What did you do? What was the result?

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