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HANDOUT: BLOODY SUNDAY AND TWO WOMEN WHO SHOOK THE CONSCIENCE OF A NATION

Chronology: The struggle for civil rights in Selma

- 1965, January** Annie Lee Cooper was beaten by Sheriff Clark while she was stood in line waiting to register to vote at the courthouse. Mrs. Boynton was arrested and jailed.
- February, 18** Jimmy Lee Jackson was shot by an Alabama State trooper and died eight days later.
- March, 7** Bloody Sunday: blacks began a march to Montgomery but they were stopped at the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma.
- March, 9** “Turnaround Tuesday”: second aborted march to Montgomery.
- March, 24** Selma-to-Montgomery March: about 25,000 people marched fifty-four miles in five days.
- March, 25** Viola Liuzzo was shot to death.
- August, 10** Congress passed the Voting Rights Act, making it easier for southern blacks to register to vote.

AMELIA BOYNTON ROBINSON (Savannah, Georgia 1911-)

- One of the most important civil rights activist and a key figure in the 1965 march in Selma, Alabama.
- 1963: after her husband death Robinson’s home and office in Selma became the center of civil rights battles.
- 1964: Amelia was the first woman to run for the Congress from Alabama.
- 1965: She organized and took part into the Selma-to-Montgomery March. On 7th March she was on the Edmund Pettus Bridge and she was beaten.
- 1990: she was awarded the Martin Luther King, Jr. Freedom Medal
- She is memorialized by the National Visionary Leadership Project.

VIOLA LIUZZO (California, 1925-Montgomery, 1965)

- She was a white civil rights activist from Michigan, wife and mother of five children.
- 1965: she was horrified by the images of “Bloody Sunday” and she went to Selma to protest. Coming back from Montgomery she was shot by Klan members.

QUOTATIONS

“Something about that day in Selma touched a nerve deeper than anything that had come before. [...] People just couldn’t believe this was happening, not in America” -John Lewis-

“And they started beating us. They had horses. And I saw them when they were beating people down, and I just stood. Then one guy hit me with the nightstick, I think it was a nightstick” –Amelia Boynton Robinson-

“Gas! Gas! And everybody started screaming again. And I looked and I saw the troopers charging us again and some of them were swinging their arms and throwing canisters and tear gas” –Sheyann Webb-

“We were singing and telling the world that we hadn’t been whipped, that we had won. I think we all realized it at the same time, that we had won something that day” –Rachel West

“I protest the attitude of the great majority of men who hold to the conviction that any married woman who is unable to find contentment and self-satisfaction when confined to home making displays a lack of emotional health” –Viola Liuzzo.

“Viola Liuzzo lived a life that combined the care of her family and her home with a concern for the world around her” –Sarah Evans-

Suggestions for further reading

- ❖ Natalie L. M. Petesch, “Selma” in *After the first death there is no other*. Iowa City, University of Iowa Press, 1974
- ❖ Callie Crossley, James A. DeVinney, Transcript of “Bridge to freedom (1965) in *Eyes on the prize* ,TV series documentary 1987.
- ❖ Sheyann Webb and Rachel West Nelson, *Selma, Lord, Selma Girlhood Memories of the Civil-Rights Days as told to Frank Sikora*, Alabama The University of Alabama press Tuscaloosa, 1970.
- ❖ J.L.Chestnut Jr. and Julia Cass, *Black in Selma the uncommon life of J.L. Chestnut Jr.*, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, The University of Alabama Press, 1984
- ❖ Vicki L. Crawford, *Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers 1941-1965*, Indiana United Press, 1993
- ❖ Peter Ling and Sharon Monteith eds, *Gender and the Civil Rights Movement*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, New Jersey, and London, 2004
- ❖ Clayborne Carson, “The Crucible- How Bloody Sunday at the Edmund Pettus Bridge Changed Everything” in *The Unfinished Agenda of the Selma-Montgomery voting rights march* ed. The editors of black issues in higher education and introduction by Tavis Smiley, New Jersey, 2005.