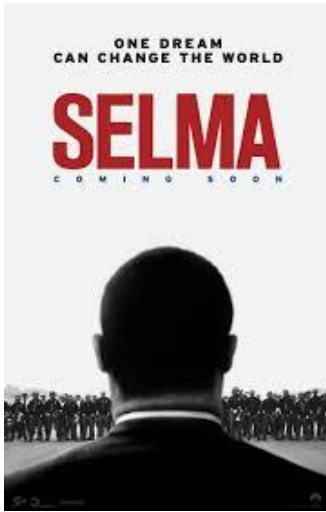


Movie Kit



American
Spaces

Selma



Year of release: 2014

Rating: PG-13

Length: 2h 8min

English level: Medium

Director: Ava DuVernay

Starring: David Oyelowo, Carmen Ejogo, Tim Roth

Themes: African-American Heritage, Civil Rights

Warning/General Advisory

Some violence and inappropriate language.

Context

This historical drama film chronicles Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s campaign to secure equal voting rights with an epic march in 1965 from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama. Even though the Civil Rights Act of 1964 had legally ended racial discrimination in the southern United States, many areas disregarded the law and continued to make it very difficult for African Americans to register to vote. In 1965, protestors staged a march in the southern city of Selma, Alabama to express their outrage at the suppression of the black vote.

Important Vocabulary/Places

- **Civil Rights Movement** – a term that encompasses the movements and struggles for social justice that took place mainly during the 1950s and 1960s for black people to gain equal rights under the law in the United States.
- **Lyndon B. Johnson** – 36th president of the United States from 1963-1969
- **SCLC** – Southern Christian Leadership Conference, an African-American civil rights organization of which Dr. King was president
- **Segregation** – the separation of people based on race, and was very common in the South before and during the Civil Rights Movement
- **Selma** – a town in Alabama where a historic civil rights march occurred
- **SNCC** – Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, an important student organization during the Civil Rights Movement

Discussion Questions

- What was Dr. Martin Luther King's ultimate goal? How were African-Americans treated during this time?
- What are your thoughts about Dr. King and his followers' intentions to march? Why is being able to vote so important?

- Why did Dr. King and the members of the SCLC choose Selma as the location for the march?
- What caused President Johnson to finally listen to Dr. King?
- Do you agree with Dr. King's protest methods? Why or why not?
- Have you ever witnessed a situation where people may have been provoked to act violently? How did the situation get resolved?
- Have you witnessed racial discrimination in your own life or communities (toward others or toward yourself)? If so, how have you or others responded?

Historical Background

Slavery in America began when the first African slaves were brought to the English colonies in the early 1600s. The majority of slaves in what had become the United States were in the agrarian southern states whose economy depended on the production of crops like cotton. By the mid-1800s, the nation's westward expansion coupled with the growing anti-slavery movement in the North provoked a debate over slavery that would lead to the American Civil War (1861-65).

Though the Union victory freed the nation's 4 million slaves, most southern states after the war passed laws that denied black people equal rights. Known as Jim Crow laws, they were a legally sanctioned system of racial discrimination that remained in effect from the 1870s until the mid-1960s. During the Jim Crow era, there were separate hospitals for blacks and whites, separate schools, separate churches, separate public restrooms, separate restaurants and hotels. The accommodations for African Americans were inferior. African Americans were not treated as equals.

The Civil Rights Movement in the United States was in reaction to this racial discrimination. In 1955, Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a Montgomery, Alabama bus. This action led to boycotts and protests. A Baptist Minister, the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. used his great public speaking abilities and advocacy of non-violent protest to become the leader of the struggle for equal rights. Years of protest marches, rallies and demonstrations followed. Although the U.S. Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to end segregation, discrimination in the southern United States continued making it very difficult for black people to register to vote.

In 1965, an Alabama city became the frontline in the fight for suffrage (the right to vote). Despite the threat of violence, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and his followers pressed forward with a courageous protest march from Selma to Montgomery. When the police attacked the peaceful marchers, the television coverage of the unprovoked violence horrified many in the United States. The Selma march culminated with President Lyndon Johnson signing the Voting Rights Act of 1965.