

Amelia Boynton Robinson

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Amelia Boynton Robinson in 2012

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How did one woman help thousands of African American people vote? She used her intelligence and courage.



Amelia Boynton Robinson meets
President Barack Obama in March 2015

Amelia Boynton Robinson and her husband lived and worked in Selma, Alabama. They worked to help African American people in rural areas of Alabama. She promoted education and helped African American communities vote and participate in their government. This was hard work. Many state governments had passed laws and rules to prevent Black people from voting. People would also use fear and threats to stop African Americans from voting. These people wanted to limit the power of Black voices. Robinson wanted to change that. She went around to different states to help African Americans register to vote.

Amelia Boynton Robinson thought of another way to help the cause of ensuring voting rights for African Americans. She invited the prominent civil rights activist Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to her house in Selma to help promote the cause. Selma became an important focus for activists helping to register African American voters.

In 1965, a civil rights activist was killed by a state trooper during a peaceful protest. In response, Amelia and other civil rights activists planned to march from Selma to the state capital in protest. On the day of the march, almost 600 people started out from Selma. But state troopers stopped them soon after. They attacked the peaceful protestors in a brutal show of violence. Journalists took pictures and video of this attack. Many people around the country were shocked by the video and photographs. People called the ordeal "Bloody Sunday."

This protest and ones that followed it pressured politicians to make a change. Later in 1965, the president of the United States signed the Voting Rights Act. This law stated that no one should be stopped from voting based on their race. It aimed to end the practices that made it harder for African Americans to register to vote.

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 was not a perfect cure to discrimination in the South. Amelia Boynton Robinson would spend the rest of her life working for racial equality. She is still remembered today as an important pioneer for civil rights.