# Marching in Alabama: The Civil Rights Act Transcript

CHILDREN: *(singing*) This little light of mine…I’m gonna let it shine.

NARRATOR: One thousand small voices united together in song in one of the South’s most segregated cities…Birmingham, Alabama. Civil rights leaders felt that by desegregating this city, they would gain enormous ground in their struggle to end racial separation. Thus began one of the most dramatic conflicts for equality.

A video shows an image of a newspaper page with an article titled “Birmingham Police Arrest 750 Negroes,” African Americans marching down a street, and police arresting and booking Martin Luther King, Junior.

NARRATOR: On May second, 1963, after months of peaceful marches and protests, threats of job loss, and the arrest of hundreds of demonstrators, it was obvious the movement needed help.

A video shows African-American students marching down the street, African-American children marching into a tunnel, and African-Americans who are looking out of a barred prison window.

NARRATOR: The call went out and the response came from students. (*students singing*) Their message was delivered in peace, but the reply came with force. Despite police dogs, firehoses, and overcrowded jail cells, the children remained committed to the cause through prayer and freedom songs.

A video shows African-American students singing and clapping, a row of young African-American children who are waving, police dogs that are biting and pulling on protesters, people hooking up firehoses and squirting protesters with high-pressure hoses, and police beating protesters with clubs.

NARRATOR: But the nation was outraged—something had to be done to end the violence. Peace, however, would not come overnight. Marchers would face resistance again almost two years later in Selma, Alabama.

A video shows policemen as they drag an African-American boy away, African-Americans rolling a gurney with a person on it out of a house and away, and hordes of marchers going down a street.

Text reads: Bloody Sunday, Selma, Alabama.

NARRATOR: Once again, children were involved in a movement to gain rights guaranteed by our Constitution, but never realized. This time it wasn't against segregation; it was for the enforcement of the fifteenth amendment—the right to vote for all American citizens, regardless of race or color.

A video shows children marching with an American flag, playing a flute, and on crutches; African Americans marching and cheering; and African Americans marching down a street with protest signs that have slogans such as “Selma’s N A A C P ” and “One man. One vote.”

NARRATOR: Sunday, March seventh, 1965, started out as a peaceful day, with a march from Selma to Montgomery. It turned into a day of tear gas, clubs, and horsemen.

A video shows people marching down a street and over a bridge while cars are stopped along the side. The video also shows police officers wearing gas masks, holding clubs, and riding horses.

POLICEMAN (*over loudspeaker*): It would be detrimental to your safety to continue this march. And I am saying that this is an unlawful assembly. You have to disperse—you are ordered to disperse. Go home or go to your church. This march will not continue.

A video shows a line of police officers armed with clubs advancing together toward the marchers.

FEMALE SPEAKER: People were running and falling and ducking and you could hear the horses’ hooves on the pavement and you’d hear the people scream. I just knew then that I was going to die. That those horses were going to trample me. So I kind of knelt down and held my hands and my arms up over my head, and I must have been screaming.

A video shows a line of police officers running and pushing marchers as they run away, fall, and get trampled. More footage shows police officers riding horses while some people are lying on the ground and others continue to run away.

NARRATOR: Sheyann Webb, just eight years old at the time of the attack, was among the youngest demonstrators to march on the day that became known as “Bloody Sunday.” This event, like many others in civil rights history, had a positive outcome in the struggle against injustice. The conscience of the nation was moved. Change was demanded.

A video shows police officers—some wearing gas masks and some riding horses—pursuing, pushing, and shoving the marchers. Many marchers are pushed to the ground and forced to stay there. More footage shows a gas cloud billowing up over the protesters.

PRESIDENT LYNDON B. JOHNSON: Today is a triumph for freedom as huge as any victory that’s ever been won on any battlefield. And today we strike away the last major shackle of those fierce and ancient bonds.

A video shows African-American marchers being carried away from the crowd of police officers by other marchers. The video turns to static and then changes to show President Johnson speaking.

NARRATOR: Motivated by Bloody Sunday, President Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act on August sixth, 1965. This broke the last legal chain keeping black Americans from equality. It was the last of the Constitution’s unrealized guarantees.

A video shows an audience that includes African Americans applauding President Johnson’s speech. The video also shows newsreel footage of President Johnson behind a desk, signing a bill with a crowd of onlookers. After signing the bill, President Johnson shakes hands with Martin Luther King, Junior.