

Amelia Boynton Robinson, Selma march organizer, dies at 104

by [Kevin Truong](#) in the [September 30, 2015](#) issue

([The Christian Science Monitor](#)) Amelia Boynton Robinson, one of the organizers of the first march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, died August 26 in Montgomery. She was 104.

Selma became a flashpoint in the civil rights movement in large part because of Boynton Robinson's efforts to bring Martin Luther King Jr. to the city and make it a battleground in the fight to grant black people the right to vote.

She "had met Dr. King in 1954 and been involved with the work of his Southern Christian Leadership Conference ever since, had long opened her house in Selma as a meeting ground for civil rights leaders," the New York Times obituary reported.

During the march on March 7, 1965, known as "Bloody Sunday," state troopers teargassed, clubbed, and whipped the 600 nonviolent protesters when they attempted to cross the Edmund Pettus Bridge. Boynton Robinson, who was near the front of the march, was knocked unconscious, and her image—appearing in newspapers nationwide—helped to galvanize support for civil rights.

In 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the federal Voting Rights Act into law. Boynton Robinson attended the ceremony at the White House as a guest of honor.

"I wasn't looking for notoriety," she told the New York Post last year. "But if that's what it took, I didn't care how many licks I got. It just made me even more determined to fight for our cause."

As part of the 50th anniversary commemoration, Boynton Robinson held hands with President Obama as they reenacted the march across the bridge (pictured left).

"She was as strong, as hopeful, and as indomitable of spirit—as quintessentially American—as I'm sure she was that day 50 years ago," President Obama said in a statement. "To honor the legacy of an American hero like Amelia Boynton requires only that we follow her example—that all of us fight to protect everyone's right to vote."

Boynton Robinson made civil rights activism a cornerstone of her life: as a girl she handed out leaflets advocating for the right for women to vote, in the 1930s and '40s she pushed for registering black voters, and in 1964 she became the first black woman to run for office in Alabama. In 1991, she published a memoir, *Bridge Across Jordan*.

“She was a loving person, very supportive—but civil rights was her life,” Bruce Boynton told the Associated Press about his mother.

Rep. John Lewis of Georgia, another civil rights leader, called Boynton Robinson a persistent voice for civil rights. “I am so glad she lived to see . . . the amazing transformation our work gave rise to in America,” Lewis said.