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Bloody Sunday

Martin Luther King Jr. is arguably the most important civil rights activist in American history. He inspired African Americans from around the country to participate in peaceful protests. Often times these protests ended violently. Many whites did not want equal rights for all races and reacted aggressively against the African Americans. "Bloody Sunday" is one such protest that was a turning point in the civil rights movement.

On February 17, 1965, protester Jimmy Lee Jackson was fatally shot by an Alabama state trooper. In response, a protest march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama was scheduled for March 7th. 600 marchers appeared in Selma on Sunday, March 7th, and led by John Lewis, crossed the Edmund Pettus Bridge over the Alabama River. Just before the bridge ended, the protestors found their way blocked by Alabama State Troopers.

When the protesters refused, the officers shot tear gas, beat the non-violent protester and eventually hospitalized over fifty people. Martin Luther King Jr. later wrote, "If I had any idea that the state troopers would use the kind of brutality they did, I would have felt compelled to give up my church duties altogether to lead the line." He tried to organize another march, but Congress urged him to delay the march until a court could rule on whether the protesters deserved federal protection. Protestors eventually got to Montgomery, Alabama on March 25, 1965.

On March 21st, the final successful march began with federal protection, and on August 6, 1965, the federal Voting Rights Act was passed. Bloody Sunday was a turning point for the civil rights movement, building public support and clearly demonstrating King's strategy of non-violence.

Works Cited

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