

Editorial

The march that changed history

Thirty years ago, on March 7, a group of very brave Americans awakened the conscience of the world. Beginning a march from Selma, Alabama to the state capital in Montgomery, they got only as far the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma before they were stopped in what became known as Bloody Sunday.

They were demanding that black as well as white Americans be guaranteed their constitutional right to vote. The brutality of the sheriffs and state officials who took part in the bloodletting then, contrasted with the courage of the men and women who withstood the onslaught with peaceful determination.

Just two weeks later, hundreds of marchers were led by Dr. Martin Luther King over the same ground. This time, they were allowed to proceed to Montgomery. Later that year, President Lyndon Baines Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act of 1965 into law, an act in which all Americans could take pride, and many did.

The three decades which have followed have, however, by and large, not been a good time for Americans. The web of conspiracy that produced the assassinations of John Kennedy and Robert Kennedy, Martin Luther King, and Malcolm X, coupled with the purposeless waste of the Vietnamese War, contributed to the disorientation of Americans. If there is nothing worth dying for, then one's life can never rise beyond a more or less bestial scramble for daily existence. Dr. Martin Luther King, like all other great men, taught that lesson—both by his life and the manner of his death. But he was not alone, as the thousands who came to Selma earlier this month to commemorate the march remind us.

The actions of J. Edgar Hoover's FBI in aiding and abetting the conspiracy to assassinate America's political leadership, played a very large role in demoralizing a whole generation of Americans. "Were there indeed values embodied within the American Constitution which were worth dying to preserve; was there an American nation worthy of the best efforts of its young people?" they asked themselves.

More and more young Americans answered, "No," as they saw their parents turn their backs upon the challenge set by Kennedy and King—not to have let

the Second World War have been fought in vain.

"Look out for number one," had become their parents' motto and it became theirs as well. As they turned to the rock-drug counterculture, the entire social fabric of the nation began to unravel, to be replaced by a scramble for sensual oblivion. Profligate hedonism engendered a kind of callous cynicism, which is more cruelly manifest today than it was by the racists at the Edmund Pettus Bridge.

Today we see the expression of this in the attempt by Phil Gramm and his supporters to again run roughshod over the U.S. Constitution and trample on the rights of the poor, the elderly, and non-whites. They have yet to resort to the bloody measures which faced civil rights activists 30 years ago; but the massive budget cuts which Gramm and Gingrich are pushing through the U.S. Congress, will result in many more deaths. This is only one step away from a situation in which we can expect to see riots met with riot police and scenes of far more bloody violence than even the horrors of the 1960s.

The 30th anniversary of Bloody Sunday, which was commemorated over the week of March 4-11 by a number of events in Selma, must mark more than a commemoration of noble deeds in the past. Thousands of Americans, white as well as black, traveled from across the United States to participate. That struggle for civil rights, for all mankind, must proceed to victory whatever the odds.

Among the leaders of the struggle who attended the ceremonies in Selma, were two prominent political leaders of today. One is Amelia Boynton Robinson, the woman nearly beaten to death at the Edmund Pettus Bridge, now vice-chairman of the Schiller Institute founded by Helga Zepp-LaRouche; the other was Dr. King's aide Rev. James Bevel, who was Lyndon LaRouche's vice-presidential running mate in 1992. Both have recently been inducted into the National Voting Rights Museum and Institute. This is especially appropriate, because the movement built by LaRouche embodies today that same moral determination for justice represented by the civil rights movement led by Martin Luther King.