

*Voteless, 1963*

(Excerpted from *Marching for Freedom*, Partridge, 2009, p.4)

In 1963, Mrs. Boynton was joined by people from the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, SNCC, or “snick.” They worked to register voters in Dallas County as well as adjoining counties, but hit huge resistance. Just for talking with Mrs. Boynton or SNCC workers, people could be fired from their jobs, beaten up, or run off the land they share cropped. By late fall 1964, SNCC workers had only managed to increase the number of black voters in Dallas County from 156 to 335.

Widespread intimidation kept most blacks obeying the rules of segregation, unable to challenge unjust laws and customs. “Fear is the key to all,” said Mrs. Boynton. “Once we lose our fear, we’ll be O.K.” But how could they make a breakthrough? She strategized with the members of the Dallas County Voters League and came up with a plan. In December, Mrs. Boynton drove to Atlanta. She asked Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and his organization, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, or SCLC, for help. As a leader in the civil rights movement, Dr. King could bring three critical missing components to Selma: motivation, money, and the media.

Mrs. Boynton’s timing was perfect. The Civil Rights Act, signed into law on July 2, 1964, by President Johnson, had outlawed segregation in schools, workplaces, and public areas such as restaurants and movie theaters. Now removing all barriers to the right to vote had become a top priority for the civil rights movement and the SCLC. “If we in the South can win the right to vote,” said King, “it will give us the concrete tool with which we ourselves can correct injustice.”