
Review of *Selma*. Directed by Ava DuVernay, 2015; Los Angeles, Paramount Pictures, film.

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The film *Selma*, depicting the historical events surrounding the passage of the 1965 Voting Right Act, was released in 2015, the fiftieth anniversary of the violent voting rights march from Selma to Montgomery. The actors and actress in this movie would go on to win awards such as the Golden Globes and an Oscar for their performances in the movie. Written by Paul Webb and directed by Ava DuVernay, *Selma* takes us back to a time in 1965 when Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and other civil rights leaders orchestrated a campaign for the right to vote, a drive met by very violent resistance from police in Selma, supported by Alabama's governor, segregationist George Wallace. This violence, which was televised and broadcasted all over the world, fully displayed the epic race problem in America. Pressure from Selma pushed President Lyndon Johnson to introduce the historic Voting Rights Bill of 1965, which was met with resistance from Southern Democrats.

This movie emphasizes Dr. King's great political skills. DuVernay and Webb dramatically reveal Dr. King's strategy of using his nonviolent movement and march-into-harm's-way approach as a means of moving public opinion. King knew that the events at Selma would be televised and broadcast all over the world. A clash with police would perfectly articulate the ugliness of Jim Crow. This was a great move by Dr. King, and it is very effectively depicted by DuVernay and Webb. While many historians would argue the passage of the Voting Rights Act resulted from the support of key Republicans in Congress and northern Democrats, both the director and writer focus instead on how Dr. King planned for the protest to become increasingly violent to gain support from whites and key religious figures. Thus, King is the agent of change. The film is all the more impressive when one considers that it does not use real quotes from the speeches of King, as permission to use them was restricted. Even in the absence of King's soaring rhetoric, the film manages to mine real drama from the events of 1965.

Although Webb and DuVernay show how Dr. King's political skills drove the nation, the president, and the Congress to support such as bill, the movie *Selma*, in my view, leaves out the key role played by President Johnson. Early on in the movie, we see King discussing Civil Rights with Johnson. The president insists in the scene that Dr. King wait on the Voting Acts bill of 1965. This is basically inaccurate, and, in fact, several historians have come out against the way that Johnson was portrayed in the movie.

Despite this issue, overall the director and writer both produced a great historical film on King and his fight for Civil Rights in Selma. Even without King's speeches, Webb and DuVernay still manage to bring out the historical aspects of the events depicted and the struggles that led to passage of the voting rights legislation. The movie equates the clash of King's nonviolence with the Alabama State Troopers to the president's use of the bully pulpit. Dr. King used a violent event to show the world that something needs to be done, just like a president would go before the nation on television and speak of something important to sway public opinion. In short, the movie *Selma* does a great job of showing how Dr. King met violence with nonviolence so that violence and brutality could be shown to millions.