



Partners in Struggle

The Legacy of Viola Liuzzo

Study Guide

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PREFACE

IN MANY WAYS, AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY is a continuously unfolding mosaic of intricately connected human designs and patterns. Individual stories contribute to the dynamic whole. The result is an expression of the awesome creativity of God. That is the focus of this four-part study. This particular series features Americans of European ancestry who collaborated with African Americans in the fight for freedom and equality. It focuses on the intriguing beauty that these particular elements bring into this unfolding mosaic. The design allows readers to “exegete” the lives of John Brown, William Lloyd Garrison, Viola Liuzzo and three college students (Michael Schwerner, James Chaney and Andrew Goodman). It provides the opportunity for exploration, reflection, critique and dialogue.

This is the third in the series of study guides, each of which focuses on the life of a different person. These particular people were selected for study due to their outstanding contributions to the abolition of slavery and to the mid-20th Century Civil Rights Movement. Each study contains background information, review, discussion and reflection questions, resources for further study, a sample lesson plan for group study and a reproducible participant handout.

The sample lesson plans contain suggested activities that are adaptable for many different time limitations. The publications in the series can be used as texts for church school classes, small group studies, church-wide retreats and interfaith events. They can also be used for special occasions such as Black History Month and Women’s History Month.

Partners in Struggle

The Legacy of Viola Liuzzo

INTRODUCTION

VIOLA LIUZZO WAS BORN about a half of a century after slavery in the United States had been made illegal. By then, over four million African Americans had been emancipated from slavery. The state of American race relations had changed since that time. With the help of high-ranking African American officials, states that had once seceded from the Union had rewritten their constitutions to outlaw slavery, in order to re-enter it. The federal government had already passed laws protecting rights of freed men and women. However, by 4/11/25, the year of Liuzzo's birth, Southern states had, in effect, nullified the new legislation and conflicts over the rights of African Americans had again erupted. State legislatures again argued for "state's rights", and instituted new legislation to control the movement of African Americans in spite of the federal laws. Notions of white supremacy that once undergirded pro-slavery arguments¹ were now resurrected in "Jim Crow" legislation that enforced segregation² and outlawed "miscegenation."³ By the time that Liuzzo was born, Southern states had forced most free black people into living conditions similar to those they and their ancestors had experienced during slavery.

However, by 1964, when Viola Liuzzo was an adult student on Wayne State University's Detroit campus, several relatively new landmark federal decisions made the state-level Jim Crow laws illegal. These included Truman's Executive Order 9981 that made segregation in the armed forces illegal, the 1954 *Brown vs. The Topeka Board of Education* decision that made segregated educational facilities illegal, and the Civil Rights Act of 1964, that had made racial discrimination of all kinds illegal and that had given the federal government the power to enforce it. This had come about as a result of the agitation and court battles of civil rights organizations, such as the NAACP⁴, SCLC⁵, SNCC⁶ and others. Within such organizations, there



was already the tradition of people of both European and African ancestry working together to bring about change. However, by the time that Viola Liuzzo joined the Selma marches, the mission had shifted slightly from creating new laws to enforcing what was already in place.

The Selma marches that she joined focused on pressuring Alabama and Selma government officials to enforce the voting rights provisions of the 15th Amendment. It was an amendment that had passed as early as February 3, 1870. It said, "The right of U.S. citizens to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of race, color or previous condition of servitude."⁷ Moreover, it had given Congress the authority to enforce and regulate it.

However, to resist the 15th Amendment, ten Southern states had rewritten sections of their constitutions so that voters had to qualify to vote. To vote, one

had to pass a literacy test and/or pay poll taxes. This was true unless the voter's grandfather had voted. This "grandfather clause" served as a loophole for white voters who could not pass the literacy tests and/or pay the poll taxes. In addition to these state-level regulations, there was widespread violence against African Americans who tried to vote. Most black people throughout the South could not vote.

The Selma marches were high profile and violent. The still relatively new medium of television projected them throughout the country. Then, on 3/25/65, the Ku Klux Klan killed Viola Liuzzo just after she participated in the third, and most successful of the Selma marches.

By then, President Lyndon Johnson had already submitted a Voting Rights Bill to Congress (3/17/65). It had been passing back and forth between the House and Senate. Even after intensive public pressure brought on by Liuzzo's death, wrangling in the House and Senate meant that Johnson was not able to sign it into law until August 8, 1965. Even so, it was pressure brought on by public reaction to Liuzzo's murder and to the televised violence in Selma that propelled the bill to passage.

Most of the earliest accounts of Viola Liuzzo were one-dimensional. Press accounts portrayed her as a homemaker who temporarily left her family to participate in the Selma marches. Segregationists and those with strict prescriptions for women's roles claimed that she had abandoned her family in order to have sex with black men, and that she was a Communist. However, research and documentation published since then since then surfaces a completely different picture of Viola Liuzzo.

The Selma march was not her first involvement with social justice activism. Neither was her trip south her first exposure to social justice issues outside her immediate community of that time. Her sensitivity to social justice seems to have been acquired in childhood. It appears to have been well-formed by the time that she entered the Selma marches. Viola's father had been a mineworker and her mother had been a teacher. Her family had moved from one economically poor and racially segregated community after another, from Tennessee, to Georgia, and throughout the South. Perhaps this equipped her with a more global perspective of racial discrimination and segregation. Having been raised in poverty, perhaps it helped her to identify with the poor in other racial and ethnic groups. Her family recalled that, when she was six years old, at her

mother's store, she took money out of the cash register and gave it to a poor black girl who seemed to be even poorer than she was.⁸

During World War II, as a young adult, unlike the vast majority of women of that era, she admitted to being inspired by Rosy the Riveter, and moved to Detroit to work in a war factory.⁹ She met her third husband, Teamster Union organizer, James Liuzzo there. She later trained as a medical lab assistant at the Carnegie Institute and took Political Science and Social Justice courses at Wayne State University. At WSU, she was arrested twice for protesting. In each instance, she insisted on a trial so that it could publicize various social justice issues.

By 1964, she and her close friend, Sarah Evans, joined the NAACP and traveled to New York to attend a United Nations program on Civil Rights sponsored by the Unitarian Universalist organization.¹⁰ In that same year, she decided to go to Selma. By then she already had an established history of protest and social activism. Some historians believe that it might have been her prior history with social justice work that was privy to the FBI when she traveled south. It might also have been the source of the false "Communist" label that some tried to attach to her.¹¹

BACKGROUND

In 1965, Selma, Alabama was a microcosm of the widespread resistance against voting rights, resistance that was taking place throughout the entire South. In Selma, a local African American group, the Dallas County Voter's League (DCVL) had begun a voter's registration drive. However, violence and resistance was so strong that they had invited prominent civil rights leaders, and had asked the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) for help. Together, they conducted three marches, all during 1965. In the first, later called "Bloody Sunday" (3/7/65), 600 people marched. However, state and local police officers beat them with Billy clubs and sprayed tear gas on them.

Aided by Dr. Martin Luther King and the SCLC, they planned a second march, but first sought a court order from then Federal Judge Frank Minis Johnson to prevent the police from interfering with it. The judge issued a restraining order until he could hold hearings. By then hundreds of people had already come to Selma to join the marches. Viola Liuzzo, back in Detroit, was watching all of this on television, as the marchers



Selma March, 1965

marched to the middle of the Edmund Pettus Bridge and held prayer.¹² By then the crowd had swollen to 8,000. They stopped when ordered to do so by police in order to avoid violating the restraining order.

On the evening of this second march, three Unitarian Universalist ministers were beaten so badly by police officers that they had to be taken to the nearby public hospital. The hospital refused to treat them, so that they had to be driven to Birmingham where one of them, James Reeb died. This too was announced over television, as Viola Liuzzo watched. It was at that point that she headed for Selma to join the march.

In the third march, spiritual leaders of many races and religions locked arms with Dr. Martin Luther King and marched across the Edmund Pettis bridge to Montgomery. That night, thousands of people held a "Stars for Freedom" rally where entertainers such as Harry Belafonte, Peter, Paul and Mary, Sammy Davis Jr., and Nina Simone performed. Taylor Branch, in his Pulitzer Prize Winning research on Dr. Martin Luther King,¹³ records the recollections of those who met, marched and worked with Viola Liuzzo at this third march. There are vignettes of her serving at registration desks, loaning her car to volunteers, shuttling people back and forth be-

tween Selma and Montgomery and, at the beginning of the day, asking for prayer, because she felt that someone was going to die that day.¹⁴

It was that night that the Ku Klux Klan killed Viola Liuzzo, as she was shuttling marchers back and forth from Selma to Montgomery. One of the reasons that news of her death got to President Lyndon Johnson so quickly was that an FBI agent, Gary Rowe, was imbedded in the car with the men who shot her.¹⁵ This same agent had been present when the Klan to which he belonged bombed the Birmingham church where four girls were attending Sunday School.

Eventually the four klansmen involved were tried and convicted. However public reaction to the events in Selma caused the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, created national consciousness that civil rights laws were not sufficient of themselves without enforcement, and called into question the activities of COINTELPRO, the spy network that J. Edgar Hoover's used to chart the activities of both the social justice activists. It called into question whether the FBI was really surveying the activities of the Ku Klux Klan, or using them for covert operations against social justice advocates.

BIBLICAL PARALLEL

**Matthew 26:14-25, 36-39, 45-46a,
47-50, 57-60; 27:1-8**

Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, 'What will you give me if I betray him to you?' They paid him thirty pieces of silver. And from that moment he began to look for an opportunity to betray him... On the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, 'Where do you want us to make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?' He said, 'Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, "The Teacher says, My time is near; I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples." ' So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover meal.

When it was evening, he took his place with the twelve; and while they were eating, he said, 'Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me.' And they became greatly distressed and began to say to him one after another, 'Surely not I, Lord?' He answered, 'The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born.' Judas, who betrayed him, said, 'Surely not I, Rabbi?' He replied, 'You have said so.' ...

Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, 'Sit here while I go over there and pray.' He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and agitated. Then he said to them, 'I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me.' And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, 'My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want.' ...

Then he came to the disciples and said to them, 'Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand.'.. While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; with him was a large crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people. Now the betrayer had given them a

sign, saying, 'The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him.' At once he came up to Jesus and said, 'Greetings, Rabbi!' and kissed him. Jesus said to him, 'Friend, do what you are here to do.' Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and arrested him...

Those who had arrested Jesus took him to Caiaphas the high priest, in whose house the scribes and the elders had gathered... Now the chief priests and the whole council were looking for false testimony against Jesus so that they might put him to death, but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward...

When morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people conferred together against Jesus in order to bring about his death. They bound him, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate the governor... When Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus* was condemned, he repented and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders. He said, 'I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.'

But they said, 'What is that to us? See to it yourself.' Throwing down the pieces of silver in the temple, he departed; and he went and hanged himself. But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said, 'It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since they are blood money.' After conferring together, they used them to buy the potter's field as a place to bury foreigners. For this reason that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day.

Judas is one of the most mysterious people in the Bible. He is mentioned 20 times in the Gospels. In most of the space given to him, he is one dimensional -- portrayed as a shadowy liar, traitor, thief and betrayer.¹⁶ He is the one who handles the money.¹⁷ No other dimension of his personality is revealed until he repents of betraying Jesus and commits suicide.¹⁸ However, there are many theories about the real identity of Judas", mostly associated with his last name, Iscariot. Some translate his last name into "liar" while others associate it with a terrorist group, the "Sicari" whose goal was to drive the Roman Empire out of Palestine.¹⁹

Judas' movement, though, suggests that he is working with rather than against the Roman Empire. It is the actions of Judas that initiate the movement of Jesus, from the Garden of Gethsemane to Temple offi-

cials and on to Pilate of the Roman Empire.²⁰ This movement alone suggests that Judas might have been associated with the embryonic Frumentii, or secret service of the Roman Empire.²¹ When necessary, it was they who co-opted people of local communities to gather information for stopping potential insurgencies.²² Experts on Roman spy networking indicate that, spy operations were growing in importance as Rome moved from a Republic to an Empire and needed to manage its vast number of local communities, many of whom were dissatisfied with the Empire. Augustus Ceasar began organizing these networks more tightly around the beginning of the 1st century CE.²³ At the time of Christ, this was still an embryonic network, employing mostly personnel associated with the distribution and collection of grain. They would carry out assassinations when necessary.²⁴ Most often Roman soldiers were involved. In such operations, it would not be unheard of for local people within specific ethnic groups to give aid.²⁵ It is highly likely that there was cooperation between Temple personnel and Roman officials, because by the time of Christ, both the High Priests and the Sanhedrin were being appointed by the Roman Empire.²⁶ Among the peasants, there was the widespread belief that the Temple officials were corrupt.²⁷

It appears that it might have been through just such a network that Jesus was crucified in the name of “homeland security”.



QUESTIONS

FOR REVIEW

- What images of Viola Liuzzo did you have prior to reading the above story of her life? Did the above story affect your image of her? If so, how?
- What are differences and similarities between COINTELPRO and spy networks in the early Roman Empire?
- What are similarities and differences are there between FBI Agent Crow and Judas?
- What are some significant partnerships between people of different races, religions and socio-economic groups in the story of the Selma marches?
- What role did prayer play in the March?

FOR DISCUSSION

- Might there have been traces of ante-bellum pro-slavery theological arguments and assumptions in the 1965 fight over voting rights?²⁸
- Consider the remarks of Viola Liuzzo, Dr. Martin Luther King and President Johnson in the side bars. What are some underlying theological themes and assumptions concerning equality and freedom in those speeches and remarks.
- How would the themes and assumptions identified in #2 above run counter to those identified in #1 above?
- What was the significance and impact of Viola Liuzzo’s life and death?

FOR REFLECTION

- Are there any parallels between contemporary concerns over “homeland security” and the story of Viola Liuzzo?
- Viola Liuzzo asked for prayer before participating in the Selma march. What role does prayer have in social activism?
- When you do social justice work, what role does prayer play?

SIDE BARS

"Prior to today I felt that any personal contribution that I might offer to those individuals in Selma was of little or no consequence...Nevertheless upon reading the content of our president's speech today, I am no longer able to sit by while my people are suffering...I examined carefully my own possible reaction if I were one of the Selma victims not just a spectator."

— *Viola Liuzzo, March 15, 1965* ²⁹

"I know you are asking today, "How long will it take?" (Speak, sir) Somebody's asking, "How long will prejudice blind the visions of men, darken their understanding, and drive bright-eyed wisdom from her sacred throne?" Somebody's asking, "When will wounded justice, lying prostrate on the streets of Selma and Birmingham and communities all over the South, be lifted from this dust of shame to reign supreme among the children of men?" Somebody's asking, "When will the radiant star of hope be plunged against the nocturnal bosom of this lonely night, (Speak, speak, speak) plucked from weary souls with chains of fear and the manacles of death? How long will justice be crucified, (Speak) and truth bear it?" (Yes, sir) I come to say to you this afternoon, however difficult the moment, (Yes, sir) however frustrating the hour, it will not be long, (No sir) because "truth crushed to earth will rise again." (Yes, sir)

How long? Not long, (Yes, sir) because "no lie can live forever." (Yes, sir) How long? Not long, (All right. How long) because "you shall reap what you sow." (Yes, sir) How long? (How long?) Not long: (Not long) Truth forever on the scaffold, (Speak)

Wrong forever on the throne, (Yes, sir) Yet that scaffold sways the future, (Yes, sir) And, behind the dim unknown, Standeth God within the shadow, Keeping watch above his own. How long? Not long, because the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice. (Yes, sir) How long? Not long, (Not long) because: Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord; (Yes, sir) He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored; (Yes) He has loosed the fateful lightning of his terrible swift sword; (Yes, sir) His truth is marching on. (Yes, sir) He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat; (Speak, sir) He is sifting out the hearts of men before His judgment seat. (That's right) O, be swift, my soul, to answer Him! Be jubilant my feet! Our God is marching on. (Yeah) Glory, hallelujah! (Yes, sir) Glory, hallelujah! (All right)

Glory, hallelujah! Glory, hallelujah! His truth is marching on. [Applause]

—Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Montgomery, Alabama, March 25, 1965.

Today what is perhaps the last of the legal barriers is tumbling...For centuries of oppression and hatred have already taken their painful toll... We must all now help to end them--through expanding programs already devised and through new ones to search out and forever end the special handicaps of those who are black in a Nation that happens to be mostly white.

So, it is for this purpose--to fulfill the rights that we now secure--that I have already called a White House conference to meet here in the Nation's Capital this fall. So, we will move step by step--often painfully but, I think, with clear vision--along the path toward American freedom. It is difficult to fight for freedom. But I also know how difficult it can be to bend long years of habit and custom to grant it. There is no room for injustice anywhere in the American mansion. But there is always room for understanding toward those who see the old ways crumbling. And to them today I say simply this: It must come. It is right that it should come. And when it has, you will find that a burden has been lifted from your shoulders, too.

It is not just a question of guilt, although there is that. It is that men cannot live with a lie and not be stained by it. The central fact of American civilization--one so hard for others to understand--is that freedom and justice and the dignity of man are not just words to us. We believe in them. Under all the growth and the tumult and abundance, we believe. And so, as long as some among us are oppressed--and we are part of that oppression--it must blunt our faith and sap the strength of our high purpose.

Thus, this is a victory for the freedom of the American Negro. But it is also a victory for the freedom of the American Nation. And every family across this great, entire, searching land will live stronger in liberty, will live more splendid in expectation, and will be prouder to be American because of the act that you have passed that I will sign today. Thank you.

— President Lyndon Baines Johnson, August 6, 1965, Speech at Signing of Voting Rights Act.

APPENDIX

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY

WEBSITES

MLK Sermon at Montgomery, Following Selma March #3, March 25, 1965

http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/kingpapers/article/our_god_is_marching_on/

LBJ Speeches upon Signing the Civil Rights Acts

1964

<http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/johnson/archives.hom/speeches.hom/640702.asp>

1965

<http://www.civilrights.org/voting-rights/vra/johnson-speech.html>

King Center for Non-Violent Change

<http://www.thekingcenter.org/>

Johnson Presidential Library

<http://www.lbjlibrary.org/>

National Voting Rights Museum and Institute

<http://nvrmi.com/>

ABC News: CIA and New York Police Department Probe

<http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/wireStory/cia-pull-officer-nypd-internal-probe-15448356>

VIDEOS

Home of the Brave

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0389009/>

SELMA MARCHES

Crossing the Bridge (Voices of Civil Rights, Episode #1)

<http://www.amazon.com/History-Channel-Presents-Voices-Rights/dp/B0006212GI>

**The Story of the March from Selma to Montgomery, Ala, March 1965,
Story of the Movement, 26 Events (from Eyes on the Prize)**

http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/eyesontheprize/story/10_march.html

Sisters of Selma (60 Minutes)

http://www.amazon.com/Sisters-Selma-Jayasri-Majumdar-Hart/dp/B000ND91ZO/ref=sr_1_1?s=movies-tv&ie=UTF8&qid=1328598967&sr=1-1

Malcolm X on the Selma March

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mg5uQQw2leU>

President Obama Speech on Selma Alabama Marches (3:00)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DdYByptC8mY>

MLK Speech at Montgomery after the Selma March #3

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TAYITODNvIM>

LBJ Speeches Upon Signing Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1965

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FKfoJJA5xWM>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MxEauRq1WxQ>

CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

Rise and Fall of Jim Crow

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/jimcrow/about.html>

Diane Nash Interviewed by Tavis Smiley

<http://video.pbs.org/video/1919144627>

James Farmer and the Civil Rights Revolution

<http://video.pbs.org/video/1512028476>

Eyes on the Prize

<http://www.shoppbs.org/product/index.jsp?productId=2445482&cp=&sr=1&kw=civil+rights&origkw=Civil+Rights&parentPage=search>

Free at Last: Civil Rights Heroes (95:00)

http://www.amazon.com/Free-Last-Civil-Rights-Heroes/dp/B0006L0LHA/ref=sr_1_1?s=movies-tv&ie=UTF8&qid=1328599071&sr=1-1

Scandalize My Name: McCarthy Era (54:00)

http://www.amazon.com/Scandalize-My-Name-Stories-Blacklist/dp/B0000EMYBR/ref=sr_1_1?s=movies-tv&ie=UTF8&qid=1328599124&sr=1-1

We Shall Not Be Moved

http://www.amazon.com/We-Shall-Not-Be-Moved/dp/B000HRMALI/ref=sr_1_1?s=movies-tv&ie=UTF8&qid=1328599177&sr=1-1

NEWSREELS

Johnson and Civil Rights Bills

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ALyk8xOc5ZU>

YOUTUBE

Noam Chomsky and Kathleen Cleaver on COINTELPRO

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PkW6FeMLiZY&feature=related> (1/7)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rp2t97Fn-FU&feature=related> (2/7)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OsYv88DNv50&feature=related> (3/7)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kAVsgN5kQvo&feature=related> (4/7)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=izfeg035x0A&feature=related> (5/7)

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1SUL9RpNgTI&feature=BFa&list=ULizfeg035x0A&lf=mfu_in_order (6/7)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BgJlaiwaLqU&feature=related> (7/7)

CIVIL LIBERTIES VS. COUNTER TERRORISM

<http://video.pbs.org/video/2121106912>

CIVIL LIBERTIES

<http://video.pbs.org/video/1512038579>

Simulation Game

http://www.blackradionetwork.com/civil_rights_movement_comes_to_life_in_simulation

MUSIC

Let Freedom Sing: How Music Inspired the Civil Rights Movement

http://www.amazon.com/Let-Freedom-Sing-Inspired-Movement/dp/B001XJBDN0/ref=sr_1_1?s=movies-tv&ie=UTF8&qid=1328599254&sr=1-1

PBS Celebration of Music from the Civil Rights Movement

<http://video.pbs.org/video/1410865290>

BERNICE JOHNSON REAGAN SINGING FREEDOM SONGS AT THE DEDICATION OF THE HOWARD ZINN ROOM AND TO RAISE MONEY FOR THE HOWARD ZINN EDUCATION PROJECT

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OLICiurmK4s>

SAMPLE LESSON PLAN

VIOLA LIUZZO

OVERVIEW

This lesson reviews the significance of Viola Liuzzo's life against the backdrop of the mid-20th Century conflicts over African American voting rights. Participants explore several themes, answering key questions such as: What are the theological misunderstandings that were undergirding segregationists' Jim Crow legislation? What does Liuzzo's life and death reveal about the improper use of government surveillance techniques? What role did prayer and worship play? Are there any contemporary applications that can be made of lessons learned in the Selma marches? The lesson explores Liuzzo's life and the story of Selma as examples of partnering across racial, class and religious lines, in the struggle for good over evil. The lesson is adaptable for 60 minute, 90 minute and for longer periods. A companion participant handout coordinates with each session element. Instructional aids on the sheet, "Resources for Further Study" can be examined for alternative activities. See "More Ideas", on p. 24. These resources can also be used by participants for further study and to prepare for the session.

OBJECTIVES

During this session, the participant will:

- describe the brutality that African Americans met while attempting to exercise voting rights in Selma, Alabama;
- identify the theological misunderstandings of white supremacy that were at the root of the segregationists' stances;
- draw parallels between the improper use of government intelligence apparatus in the lives of Liuzzo and Jesus;
- make modern applications of lessons learned from the life of Viola Liuzzo and the Selma marches...

KEY CONCEPTS

- Jim Crow
- White Supremacy
- 15th Amendment
- Voting Rights Act of 1964
- Voting Rights Act of 1965
- COINTELPRO
- Roman Spy Networks
- Judas

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Duplicated Participant Handouts
- Bibles
- If using material that is online (such as from YouTube), or DVDs, a data projector, laptop, speakers and screen will be needed. If you do not have such equipment, substitute that activity in the lesson plan by having the class take turns reading the story of Viola Liuzzo from the participant handout. Then use the extra time to explore in more depth with the class answers to the discussion questions.
- Pencils and Loose leaf Paper
- To make the quotes in the "Side Bars" available, either print them on poster board and display them in prominent places, print them onto overhead projector film and project via an overhead projector; project them onto a screen, using a laptop computer, data projector and screen; send them to enrollees via email during the week prior to the session with questions to guide their reading of them or duplicate them and then distribute them in the session itself. If the period is longer than one hour, it may be possible for volunteers to read each quote just prior to the discussion them.

STEP	A - One Hour Session	B - 90 Minute Session	C - Longer than 90 Min. Sess.
Ice Breaker	“Round Robin” style, each person, within one minute, introduces him/herself, and explains something s/he might have done during the previous month to help someone or to fight for social justice. If the group is large, participants can form small groups share within those groups. (10:00)	Participants divide into groups of no larger than four. Within each group, participants discuss someone in their families who had a keen sense for social justice, and how that person’s enthusiasm might have affected his/her life. (15:00)	Pin the name (or tape the label) of a famous woman with an outstanding record of social justice work. Then participants divide into pairs with each partner getting help from his/her partner in guessing the name that is taped to his/her back. Each partner has seven minutes. If time allows, reconvene into the larger group. Then participants share one thing they have learned or can learn from the person they were discussing in the small group. (20:00)
Violet Liuzzo	Show PBS: “Story of the March from Selma to Montgomery” (7:45) [See “Resources for Further Study] Ask for volunteers to briefly respond to the film, then take turns reading the short form of information on William Lloyd Garrison . in the participant handout. (5:00)	Show PBS: “Story of the March from Selma to Montgomery” (7:45) (See “Resources for Further Study”, p. 14) Ask for volunteers to briefly respond to the film. Then take turns reading the related information printed on the Participant Handout. (5:00)	Show PBS: “Story of the March from Selma to Montgomery” (7:45) (See “Resources for Further Study”, p. 14) Ask for volunteers to briefly respond to the film. Then take turns reading the related information printed on the Participant Handout. (5:00)
Judas Betraying Jesus	Ask volunteers to read the biblical passage and then read the exegesis that follows it. (5:00)	Ask volunteers to read the biblical passage and then read the short exegesis that follows it. (5:00)	Ask volunteers to read the biblical passage and then read the exegesis that follows it. (5:00) Answer the review questions together in the larger group. (15:00)
Review Questions	Discuss the Review Questions in small groups with each group having a different set of questions from among those listed. One reporter from each group then reads his/her group’s assigned questions and reports the group’s answers to the larger group. (15:00)	Participants select numbers and each person answers a different question in the larger group. If it is a large group, then people with the same number form groups and answer the assigned question together. The recorder reports to outcome in the larger group. (20:00)	Break into smaller groups. This time, each small group has the same group of discussion questions. After discussing them in the smaller group, a recorder reports the answers to the larger group when it is reconvened. Each question would be reported upon separately for purposes of comparing answers. (25:00)
Discussion Questions	Return to the smaller groups, with each small group having been assigned a different set of discussion questions. One person from the group reports out to the larger group when it reconvenes. (15:00)	Break into smaller groups. This time, each small group is assigned the same group of discussion questions. After discussing them in the smaller group, a recorder reports the answers to the larger group when it is reconvened. Each question would be reported upon separately for purposes of comparing answers. (25:00)	Play and Sing along with Bernice Johnson Reagan, singing freedom songs at the Howard Zinn room dedication. See Resources for Further Study, p. 14.
Additional Activity, if time allows.	Reflect on the entire session in the larger group.		

MORE IDEAS

PANEL DISCUSSION

Panel discussions can provide background information on various topics and they can give participants a chance to co-facilitate the session. Each panelist focuses on a different topic. Each consults a different source from “Resources for Further Study” to prepare a short presentation each. The length of time for each panelist depends on the time limitations of the overall session. Some ideas are:

■ **Landmark Civil Rights Legislation Preceding the Selma March**

Outside of class, each panelist studies a different piece of Civil Rights Legislation (Truman’s Executive Order 9981, Brown vs. Topeka Board of Education, 15th Amendment, 14th Amendment, Civil Rights Act of 1964), and presents it to the class, followed by a brief Q &A. If possible, invite a Civil Rights attorney to participate in the Q&A).

■ **MLK or Johnson Speeches (See Resources for Further Study)**

Play one of the speeches posted on “Resources for Further Study”, and ask for reactions for key parts of it. If possible, list some of the metaphors that they use and distribute before hand, and “unpack” them, following the speech. In the “unpacking”, provide information about the historical context in which they are speaking. If possible, invite an African American Studies professor from a local university to help with the “unpacking” of the metaphors.

MUSIC

■ **Singspiration with Music from the Civil Rights Movement**

Secure DVD’s of Sweet Honey & the Rock or other collections of “Movement” songs and listen as a group and sing along. If possible, ask the director of the choir to lead the group as though it is a choir rehearsal.

FILM SERIES

For each week that the series is being studied, present a parallel film series on a different time and location. Once a week, present a film that gives more information

about the historical background of Viola Liuzzo and the other abolitionists being studied. You might set it up like a movie theater, with refreshments, and, if time allows, have a “Talk Back” discussion following each film. See descriptions and sources for the following, on the “Resources for Further Study” (pages 15-16),

- ***Home of the Brave***
- ***Sisters of Selma***
- ***Rise and Fall of Jim Crowe***
- ***Eyes on the Prize, Episode 6, Selma to Montgomery March***
- ***Free at Last Civil Rights Heroes***
- ***Scandalize My Name: McCarthy Era***
- ***We Shall Not Be Moved***
- ***PBS Celebration of the Music from the Civil Rights Movement***
- ***Whispers of Angels: The Underground Railroad***

ON LINE DISCUSSION GROUPS

Create an online discussion group, using Yahoo, Face book, or Blackboard. Post a given video clip on a related subject, from YouTube and post a related discussion questions. During the week leading into the lesson, participants view the tape, then answer the discussion question, and then respond to each other’s answers of the discussion question. In the actual class session, the discussion is continued at the appropriate time.

ASSIGNING VIDEO CLIPS AND WEBSITES

Once the email addresses of enrollees are obtained, cut and paste the sheet, “Resources for Further Research” within emails and ask participants to explore some of the cites, based on their interests as preparation for sharing their discoveries in the upcoming session.

MUSIC AND DEVOTIONALS

As participants are gathering, play music from the Civil Rights Movement. Then open the session with prayer, being sure to mention some of the overall spiritual goals of the study. For examples of collections of Civil Rights Era music from YouTube, see page 15. However, professional recordings are available online at Amazon.com, Barnes & Noble and other cites.

PARTICIPANT HANDOUT

INTRODUCTION

VIOLA LIUZZO WAS BORN about a half of a century after slavery in the United States had been made illegal. By then, over four million African Americans had been emancipated from slavery. The state of American race relations had changed since that time. With the help of high-ranking African American officials, states that had once seceded from the Union had rewritten their constitutions to outlaw slavery, in order to re-enter it. The federal government had already passed laws protecting rights of freed men and women. However, by 4/11/25, the year of Liuzzo's birth, Southern states had, in effect, nullified the new legislation and conflicts over the rights of African Americans had again erupted. By the time that Liuzzo was born, Southern states had forced most free black people into living conditions similar to those they and their ancestors had experienced during slavery.

However, by 1964, when Viola Liuzzo was an adult student on Wayne State University's Detroit campus, several relatively new landmark federal decisions made the state-level Jim Crow laws illegal. However, by the time that Viola Liuzzo joined the Selma marches, the mission had shifted slightly from creating new laws to enforcing what was already in place.

The Selma marches that she joined focused on pressuring Alabama and Selma government officials to enforce the voting rights provisions of the 15th Amendment. To resist the 15th Amendment, ten Southern states had rewritten sections of their constitutions so that voters had to qualify to vote with poll taxes and literacy tests. However, a "grandfather clause" allowed whites to vote if their grandfathers had voted. Most black people throughout the South could not vote.

The Selma marches were high profile and violent. The still relatively new medium of television projected them throughout the country. Then, on 3/25/65, the Ku Klux Klan killed Viola Liuzzo just after she participated in the third, and most successful of the Selma marches.

Most of the earliest accounts of Viola Liuzzo were one-dimensional. However, The Selma march was not her first involvement with social justice activism. Neither was her trip south her first exposure to social justice issues outside her immediate community of that time. It appears to have been well-formed by the time that she

entered the Selma marches. Viola's father had been a mineworker and her mother had been a teacher. Her family had moved from one economically poor and racially segregated community after another, from Tennessee, to Georgia, and throughout the South. Perhaps this equipped her with a more global perspective of racial discrimination and segregation.

During World War II, as a young adult, unlike the vast majority of women of that era, she admitted to being inspired by Rosy the Riveter, and moved to Detroit to work in a war factory.³⁰ She met her third husband, Teamster Union organizer, James Liuzzo there. She later trained as a medical lab assistant at the Carnegie Institute and took Political Science and Social Justice courses at Wayne State University. At WSU, she was arrested twice for protesting. In each instance, she insisted on a trial so that it could publicize various social justice issues.

By 1964, she and her close friend, Sarah Evans, joined the NAACP and traveled to New York to attend a United Nations program on Civil Rights sponsored by the Unitarian Universalist organization.³¹ In that same year, she decided to go to Selma. By then she already had an established history of protest and social activism. Some historians believe that it might have been her prior history with social justice work that was privy to the FBI when she traveled south. It might also have been the source of the false "Communist" label that some tried to attach to her.³²

BACKGROUND

In 1965, Selma, Alabama was a microcosm of the widespread resistance against voting rights, resistance that was taking place throughout the entire South. There were three Selma marches. In the first, later called "Bloody Sunday" (3/7/65), 600 people marched. However, state and local police officers beat them with billy clubs and sprayed tear gas on them. This caught national attention and an outcry from the public. Dr. King and the SCLC then got an injunction to prevent police from stopping any other marches.

Viola Liuzhou, back in Detroit, was watching all of this on television. On the evening of the second march, three Unitarian Universalist ministers were

beaten so badly by police officers that they had to be taken to the nearby public hospital. The hospital refused to treat them, so that they had to be driven to Birmingham where one of them, James Reeb died. It was at that point that Liuzzo headed for Selma to join the march. In the third march, spiritual leaders of many races and religions locked arms with Dr. Martin Luther King and marched across the Edmund Pettis Bridge to Montgomery.

It was that night that the Ku Klux Klan killed Viola Liuzzo as she was voluntarily shuttling marchers from Selma to Montgomery. One of the reasons that news of her death got to President Lyndon Johnson so quickly was that an FBI agent, Gary Rowe, was imbedded in the car with the men who shot her.³³

This same agent had been present when the Klan to which he belonged bombed the Birmingham church where four girls were attending Sunday School.³⁴ Eventually the four klansmen involved were tried and convicted. However, public reaction to the events in Selma caused the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, created national consciousness that civil rights laws were not sufficient of themselves without enforcement, and called into question the activities of COINTELPRO, the spy network that J. Edgar Hoover's used to chart the activities of social justice activists. The Selma marches also raised questions of whether the FBI was really surveying the activities of the Ku Klux Klan, or using them for covert operations against social justice advocates.

BIBLICAL PARALLEL

Matthew 26:14-25, 36-39, 45-46a, 47-50, 57-60; 27:1-8

Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, 'What will you give me if I betray him to you?' They paid him thirty pieces of silver. And from that moment he began to look for an opportunity to betray him... On the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, 'Where do you want us to make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?' He said, 'Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, "The Teacher says, My time is near; I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples." ' So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover meal.

When it was evening, he took his place with the twelve; and while they were eating, he said, 'Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me.' And they became

greatly distressed and began to say to him one after another, 'Surely not I, Lord?' He answered, 'The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born.' Judas, who betrayed him, said, 'Surely not I, Rabbi?' He replied, 'You have said so.' ... Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane.. And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, 'My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want.' ...

Then he came to the disciples and said to them, 'Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand.'.. While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; with him was a large crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people. Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, 'The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him.' At once, he came up to Jesus and said, 'Greetings, Rabbi!' and kissed him. Jesus said to him, 'Friend, do what you are here to do.' Then they came, laid hands on Jesus, and arrested him...

Those who had arrested Jesus took him to Caiaphas the high priest, in whose house the scribes and the elders had gathered... Now the chief priests and the whole council were looking for false testimony against Jesus so that they might put him to death, but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward...

When morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people conferred together against Jesus in order to bring about his death. They bound him, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate the governor... When Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he repented and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders. He said, 'I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.'*

But they said, 'What is that to us? See to it yourself.' Throwing down the pieces of silver in the temple, he departed; and he went and hanged himself. But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said, 'It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since they are blood money.' After conferring together, they used them to buy the potter's field as a place to bury foreigners. For this reason that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day. (Matthew 26:14-25, 36-39, 45-46a, 47-50, 57-60; 27:1-8, NRSV)

Judas is one of the most mysterious people in the Bible. He is mentioned 20 times in the Gospels. In most of the space given to him, he is one dimensional -- portrayed as a shadowy liar, traitor, thief and betrayer.³⁵ He is the one who handles the money.³⁶ No other dimension of his personality is revealed until he repents of betraying Jesus and commits suicide.³⁷ However, there are many theories about the real identity of Judas", mostly associated with his last name, Iscariot. Some translate his last name into "liar" while others associate it with a terrorist group, the "Sicarii" whose goal was to drive the Roman Empire out of Palestine.³⁸

Judas' movement, though, suggests that he is working with rather than against the Roman Empire. It is the actions of Judas that initiate the movement of Jesus, from the Garden of Gethsemane to Temple officials and on to Pilate of the Roman Empire.³⁹ This movement alone suggests that Judas might have been associated with the embryonic Frumentarii, or secret service of the Roman Empire.⁴⁰ When necessary, they co-opted people of local communities to gather information for stopping potential insurgencies.⁴¹ Experts on Roman spy networking indicate that, spy operations were growing in importance as Rome moved from a Republic to an Empire and needed to manage its vast empire of communities, many of whom were dissatisfied with the Empire.

Augustus Caesar began organizing these networks more tightly around the beginning of the 1st century CE.⁴² At the time of Christ, this was still an embryonic network, employing mostly personnel associated with the distribution and collection of grain. They would carry out assassinations when necessary.⁴³ Most often-Roman soldiers were involved. In such operations, it would not be unheard of for local people within specific ethnic groups to be co-opted.⁴⁴ It is highly likely that there was cooperation between Temple personnel and Roman officials, because by the time of Christ, both the High Priests and the Sanhedrin were being appointed by the Roman Empire.⁴⁵ Among the peasants, there was the widespread belief that the Temple officials were corrupt.⁴⁶

It appears that it might have been through just such a network that Jesus was crucified in the name of "homeland security".

QUESTIONS

FOR REVIEW

- What images of Viola Liuzzo did you have prior to reading the above story of her life? Did the above story affect your image of her? If so, how?
- What are differences and similarities between COINTELPRO and spy networks in the early Roman Empire?
- What are some significant partnerships between people of different races, religions and socio-economic groups in the story of the Selma marches?
- What role did prayer play in the Selma march?

FOR DISCUSSION

- What might have been some old pro-slavery arguments underlying the 1965 fight over voting rights?
- Consider the remarks of Viola Liuzzo, Dr. Martin Luther King and President Johnson in the side bars. What are some underlying assumptions about freedom and equality?
- How would the themes and assumptions identified in #2 above run counter to those identified in #1 above?
- What was the significance and impact of Viola Liuzzo's life and death?

FOR REFLECTION

- Are there any parallels between contemporary concerns about "homeland security" Viola Liuzzo's encounter with the FBI?
- Viola Liuzzo asked for prayer before the Selma march. What role does prayer have in social justice activities?
- When you do social justice work, what role does prayer play in your life?

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END NOTES

- ¹ They argued that white supremacy is founded on the "curse of Ham" (Genesis 9).
- ² They argued, based on Genesis 10, that the dispersal of the nations was divinely sanctioned segregation.
- ³ They argued that governments exist by divine sanction and therefore the federal government should not interfere with race relations at the state level.
- ⁴ National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
- ⁵ Southern Christian Leadership Conference
- ⁶ Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee
- ⁷ <http://www.law.cornell.edu/constitution/amendmentxv>
- ⁸ Giannino
- ⁹ Giannino
- ¹⁰ Giannino
- ¹¹ Giannino
- ¹² Branch, *At Canaan's Edge*
- ¹³ Branch, *At Canaan's Edge*
- ¹⁴ Giannino
- ¹⁵ Branch, 173.
- ¹⁶ Matthew 28:23
- ¹⁷ John 13:29
- ¹⁸ Bastiaan van Israel, "Mark: A Reader-Response Commentary" *Continuum International*, 1998, 167.
- ¹⁹ Taylor, Joan, "The name Iskarioth (Iscaiot), *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 129, #2, Summer, 2010, 369.
- ²⁰ Sinnigren, 213.
- ²¹ Reynolds, 170.
- ²² Sinnigren, 214.
- ²³ Sinnigren, 66.
- ²⁴ Sinnigren, 213.
- ²⁵ Horseley 216.
- ²⁶ Horseley 217.
- ²⁷ Birchett 158.
- ²⁸ State's Rights (Romans 14), White Supremacy (Genesis 9), Separation of the Races (Genesis 10), Miscegenation (Genesis 10).
- ²⁹ Branch, Taylor, *At Canaan's Edge: America in the King Years, 1965-1968*, (New York: Simon and Shuster, 2006), 120.
- ³⁰ Giannino.
- ³¹ See notes 1-3.
- ³² See notes 1-3.
- ³³ Branch, 136.
- ³⁴ Branch, 158.
- ³⁵ John 12:6.
- ³⁶ John 13:29.
- ³⁷ Bastiaan van Israel, "Mark: A Reader-Response Commentary" *Continuum International*, 1998, 167.
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- ³⁹ Sinnigren, 70.
- ⁴⁰ Sinnigren 214.
- ⁴¹ Reynolds, 170.
- ⁴² Reynolds, 188.
- ⁴³ Sinnigren, 72.
- ⁴⁴ Reynolds, 185.
- ⁴⁵ Sinnigen, 78.
- ⁴⁶ Sinnigen, 213.
- ⁴⁷ State's Rights (Romans 14), White Supremacy (Genesis 9), Separation of the Races (Genesis 10), Miscegenation (Genesis 10).