Amelia Boynton Robinson: Black Voting Rights Advocate

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The Selma-to-Montgomery March in March 1965, which resulted in the passage of the Voting Rights Act which removed voting restrictions so that African Americans could fully exercise one of their Constitutional rights, is closely identified with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who led the final march. However, it is largely forgotten that Amelia Platts Boynton Robinson, a long-time Selma activist, invited King and his organization, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), to the city to assist the freedom movement there. Robinson, then known as Amelia Boynton, was one of the leaders of the Dallas County Voters League, an organization that had been fighting to register African Americans in Selma and the surrounding areas since the 1930s. Boynton, along with countless others, laid the necessary groundwork for the 1965 Selma March.

Robinson has a long history as a committed social activist, beginning with her activities in support of woman suffrage as a young girl. Born on August 18, 1911 in Savannah, Georgia, her parents stressed education, and Robinson received a degree in home economics from Tuskegee University. Her career began as a teacher in Georgia, and she came to Selma as a home demonstration agent for the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), educating the rural population about food production and nutrition. Boynton and her husband, Samuel Boynton, were involved in registering African Americans to vote, a very difficult process that Boynton achieved in 1934. Voter registration became one of Boynton’s passions, and after her husband passed in 1963, she worked with local and national activists to register African Americans in a city where they were 50% of the population, but only 1% of registered voters as late as 1965. It was Boynton, James Bevel, and others who organized the Selma-to-Montgomery March that was known as “Bloody Sunday,” where marchers were attacked by state troopers on the Edmund Pettis Bridge. Boynton herself was rendered unconscious by the teargas used to disperse participants. It inspired the completion of the final march from March 21-24, 1965.

Now Amelia Robinson, she is still active at the age of 103, able to attend President Obama’s 2015 State of the Union Address and has received numerous honors and awards.

REFERENCES