

Summary:

Selma: The Bridge to the Ballot is the true story of the forgotten heroes in the fight for voting rights—the courageous students and teachers of Selma, Alabama, who stood up against injustice despite facing intimidation, arrests and violence. By organizing and marching bravely, these change-makers achieved one of the most significant victories of the civil rights era.

The sacrifices of those who fought so hard for equality should never be forgotten. In the 2012 presidential election, more than 90 million eligible voters did not go to the polls. In the 18–24 age group, only six out of 10 voted. And, in 2014, voter turnout dropped to a 72-year low.

This 40-minute film, narrated by Academy Award winner Octavia Spencer, is a crucial reminder that each of us has the ability to bring about powerful social change and will help inspire young people and communities across the nation to exercise their right to participate in our democracy.

Discussion Questions:

These questions come from the ***Selma: The Bridge to the Ballot Viewers Guide***, developed by Learning for Justice, a project of the Southern Poverty Law Center, and is included in this Kit.

- How did people in power use laws, custom and procedures to maintain a status quo that favored them? What are some examples of people in power using these tactics today?
- Why was nonviolent action so effective, and what unique leverage does nonviolent resistance have in the face of power and force?
- What kinds of planning, organizing and communication are required to take action and bring about change? Is participating in a demonstration enough?
- How did individuals further the movement? How did organized groups further the movement?

- Does voting still matter? If so, why do so few people exercise the right to vote?

- Who had the legal right to vote in 1965? Who was able to exercise that right? How were most African Americans in Selma prevented from voting until 1965?

- What role did the media—mainly newspapers and television—play in bringing about awareness and public support for change in the South?

- Why did students join the movement when so many adults hesitated?

- What parallels exist between events of the early 1960s and events today?

- What effect did the civil rights movement have on racial discrimination and injustice? In what ways was it successful? In what ways do racial discrimination and injustice still exist?

Want to view more films about these topics?

After Selma

The Joan Trumpauer Mulholland Foundation

Emmy-winning filmmaker, Loki Mulholland (“The Uncomfortable Truth”), civil rights veteran, Joanne Blackmon Bland, and New York Times bestselling author, Carol Anderson (“White Rage”) dive into the history of voter suppression and the need for us to challenge it in order to preserve our democracy and equality for all.

John Lewis: Good Trouble

Magnolia Pictures

An intimate account of legendary U.S. Representative John Lewis’ life, legacy and more than 60 years of extraordinary activism — from the bold teenager on the front lines of the Civil Rights movement to the legislative powerhouse he was throughout his career. After Lewis petitioned Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to help integrate a segregated school in his hometown of Troy, Alabama, King sent “the boy from Troy” a round trip bus ticket to meet with him. From that meeting onward, Lewis became one of King’s closest allies. He organized Freedom Rides that left him bloodied or jailed, and stood at the front lines in the historic marches on Washington and Selma. He never lost the spirit of the “boy from Troy” and called on his fellow Americans to get into “good trouble” until his passing on July 17, 2020.

The Vote (Two Part Series) **PBS**

One hundred years after the passage of the 19th Amendment, *The Vote* tells the dramatic culmination story of the hard-fought campaign waged by American women for the right to vote — a transformative cultural and political movement that resulted in the largest expansion of voting rights in U.S. history.

In its final decade, from 1909 to 1920, movement leaders wrestled with contentious questions about the most effective methods for affecting social change. They debated the use of militant, even violent tactics, as well as hunger strikes and relentless public protests. The battle for the vote also upended previously accepted ideas about the proper role of women in American society and challenged the definitions of citizenship and democracy.

Exploring how and why millions of 20th-century Americans mobilized for — and against — women's suffrage, *The Vote* brings to life the unsung leaders of the movement and the deep controversies over gender roles and race that divided Americans then — and continue to dominate political discourse today.

Willie Velasquez: Your Vote Is Your Voice **PBS**

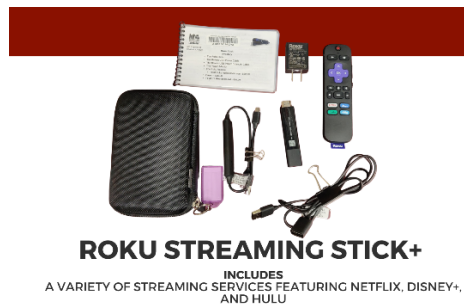
Political empowerment for Latinos in the United States has always been difficult. A Mexican-American butcher's son from Texas, Willie Velasquez questioned the lack of Latino representation in his city's government, propelling him into a lifelong battle to gain political equality for Latinos. This documentary examines obstacles Latinos had to overcome to obtain representation, and addresses issues facing Latinos today.

Slay the Dragon **Magnolia Pictures**

Gerrymandering has become an immensely powerful weapon of partisan advantage, creating an unresponsive and unaccountable government. But ahead of the 2020 elections and a new round of redistricting, voters are fighting back. With exclusive access to influential, citizen-led activist groups, as well as the legal team that brought the most important voting rights case in a generation to the Supreme Court, the film chronicles the civic grit that is turning the tide in the battle.

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