

Alexandria Times

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Alexandria
COMMUNITY MEDIA

One person can make a difference

In 2022, Alexandrians delivered soil representing the lives of lynching victims Joseph McCoy and Benjamin Thomas to the Legacy Museum in Montgomery, Alabama, and met a remarkable woman, Jo Ann Bland. At just 11 years old, she was the youngest to attempt to march from Selma to Montgomery on Bloody Sunday.

The Walk for Freedom was planned after state troopers killed an unarmed Black man trying to protect his mother from police. Protestors also wanted to meet with Gov. George Wallace to demand their right to vote. Bland never made it across the Edmund Pettus bridge that day. Club-wielding mounted police, armed state troopers, tear and nausea gas and smoke disbanded the peaceful protest.

"What happened at that bridge didn't stop at that bridge, it happened in our neighborhood all night long," Bland said.

Wallace defended the use of violent force against the

peaceful demonstrators saying they were a threat to the "peace and security of the people of Alabama."

The next day, Sen. Walter Mondale reacted: "The citizens of Minnesota and of the United States can no longer tolerate the trampling of human rights by southern law enforcement officers in the name of law and order. This is totalitarian oppression at its worst – it is what we fought against in World War II and it is what we are fighting against in the cold war today."

Martin Luther King, Jr. planned another march and asked the courts for an injunction to stop the government from interfering.

President Lyndon B. Johnson condemned the violence saying, "It is wrong to do violence to peaceful citizens in the streets of their town."

Johnson disagreed with Wallace, who asked him to stop the march.

"Those who do injustice are as surely the victims

of their own acts as the people that they wrong. They scar their own lives and they scar the communities in which they live," he said.

Johnson directed the Federal Court in Alabama to order officials, "not to interfere with American citizens who are peacefully demonstrating for their constitutional rights."

On March 15, 1965, Johnson appeared on national television and told Americans: "At times history and fate meet at a single time in a single place to shape a turning point that is man's unending search for freedom. So, it was at Lexington and Concord. So, it was a century ago at Appomattox. So, it was last week in Selma, Alabama."

The demonstrations in Selma had a much larger and deeper meaning for American democracy, according to Johnson, who asked for the public's support for voting rights legislation.

Organizers expected about 700 people from outside Selma to join the march, but on March



Jo Ann Bland.

PHOTO/
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21, 1965, more than 3,000 people showed up. By the time they reached Montgomery, 50,000 had joined the protest.

Bland, who died on Feb. 19, 2026, was with them.

On April 23, in *Remembrance of Joseph McCoy, the Alexandria Community Remembrance Project* invites the public to hear Rodney Sadler, Ph.D., address the relationship of violence and power with the people at Roberts Memorial United Methodist Church, 606 S. Washington St., at 7 p.m. Find out more at www.alexandriava.gov/cultural-history/alexandria-community-remembrance-project.

Out of the Attic is provided by the Office of Historic Alexandria.