



*Martin Luther King Jr., with Coretta Scott King and the foot soldiers of the civil rights movement, circa 1964.*

# Foot soldiers, past and present

*UW professor David Domke credits unknown activists for shaping Civil Rights era events like those in Selma, Ala. A new group is shaping history today.*

**BY ROSETTE ROYALE**  
CONTRIBUTING WRITER



UW professor David Domke is conducting a lecture series about the foot soldiers who, along with MLK Jr., forged the civil rights movement

"History is written by the victors." At least, that's what a famous quote tells us. Trouble is, there's no real agreement on who spoke or wrote those words. Maybe it was Niccolò Machiavelli, author of the 16th-century work of political philosophy, "The Prince." Or maybe it was former British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. Or maybe it's someone we don't know. History is full of those people. University of Washington professor of communications David Domke thinks local folks, some who aren't enrolled as Huskies, might like to learn some of those forgotten names.

In particular, Domke, chair of the communications department, thinks people might be interested in some of the forgotten participants in the Civil Rights Movement. To that end, he created a five-part UW lecture series called "Marching to Selma: How MLK, LBJ & the Civil Rights Movement Changed the World." The series will touch on other pivotal moments and individuals: Nashville, Tenn.'s connection to the nonviolence movement and the Birmingham, Ala., Campaign, where black activists used nonviolent direct action against white Southern institutions and

leaders; the Freedom Riders of Mississippi; Lyndon Johnson, the movement's unlikely ally; and, of course, the three marches that emanated from Selma, including the first on March 7, 1965. On a day known as Bloody Sunday, close to 600 protest marchers were met by Alabama state troopers who beat some of them with billy clubs. More than 50 people were hospitalized. The televised events traveled around the world, and the responding outcry led, in part, to LBJ signing the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Domke said that while he's long been interested in racial justice, the issue came to the fore when he was a graduate student in Los Angeles in April 1992. That was when four white police officers charged with the beating of an unarmed black man named Rodney King, an event caught on videotape, were found not guilty of assault and use of excessive force. The verdict led to days of unrest, where an estimated 2,000 people were injured. "I began to become sensitized to the differences between my experience and the experiences of many people of color in this country," said Domke of the verdict and unrest.

These days, he leads what he calls pilgrimages to the South, two annual sojourns where local adults and UW and Bellevue College students visit civil rights-era sites. The trips last between seven and

10 days, and 40 to 50 people participate. The adults pay their own way and cover most of the students' costs, he said. "And we meet with all these foot soldiers of the civil rights movement," he said.

It was those foot soldiers who were the focus of our conversation in early January, at the Medgar Evers Pool, adjacent to Garfield High School. Domke said he chose the pool a few years ago because it was easy to reach. He kept returning, however, because being at a place that invoked Evers — a Civil Rights leader who, in 1963, was shot and killed in his Jackson, Miss., driveway by a member of a white supremacist group — took on a larger meaning. "Coming here is one of the ways I try to feed my soul each day," he said.

In a brief conversation before a swim, Domke talked about why Selma's importance still resonates today, the controversies surrounding the recent film "Selma," similarities between protests 50 years ago and those today, and the people whose work we know but whose names we may never have heard.

*Rosette Royale: Why are you doing a series about Selma? What is it that we need to know?*

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