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OPINION

Staying on the March Right Now

Stand up to those wanting to turn back the clock

BY MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN



Fifty years ago I traveled from Mississippi to Selma, Ala. to join Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and thousands of fellow citizens marching the 54 miles to the steps of the state's capitol in Montgomery. Millions of Americans now know about this march thanks to the movie Selma and the recent 50th anniversary celebration.

Selma was the site of a courageous voting rights campaign by black citizens which was met by brutal Southern Jim Crow law enforcement and citizen violence. The nation was shocked two weeks earlier when John Lewis and Rev. Hosea Williams set out on a nonviolent march with a group of 600 people toward Montgomery to demand their right to vote and were brutally attacked by lawless state and local law enforcement officials at the Edmund Pettus Bridge.

The televised images of

"Bloody Sunday" and the savage beatings of the marchers—including Congressman Lewis whose skull was fractured—were a pivotal moment in the Civil Rights Movement and in America's struggle to become America. It provoked the thousands of us (ultimately about 25,000) who came together later to finish the march, safer thanks to Federal District Court Judge Frank M. Johnson Jr.'s order that we had a right to peaceful protest and with National Guard protection. And we were buoyed by President Johnson's March 15, 1965 address calling on Congress to pass what became the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

In that speech—"The American Promise"—President Johnson said: "This was the first nation in the history of the world to be founded with a purpose. The great phrases of that purpose still sound in every American heart, North and South: 'All men are created equal'—'government by consent of the governed'—'give me liberty or give me death'... Those words are a promise to every citizen that he shall share in the dignity of man... To apply any other test—to deny a man his hopes because of his color or race, his religion or the place of his birth—is not only to do injustice, it is to deny America and to

dishonor the dead who gave their lives for American freedom"

Fifty years later, speaking at the Edmund Pettus Bridge, President Obama echoed the same themes: "[Selma is] the manifestation of a creed written into our founding documents... These are not just words. They're a living thing, a call to action, a roadmap for citizenship and an insistence in the capacity of free men and women to shape our own destiny."

The first Selma march was

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planned not only to gain the right to vote but to protest the tragic death of Jimmie Lee Jackson, a 26-year-old black church deacon and military veteran killed in Marion, Ala. when he, his mother, sister, and 82-year-old grandfather attended another nonviolent voting rights demonstration where marchers were brutally attacked by racist Alabama law enforcement officials who broke it up. Jackson was shot and beaten trying to shield his mother from a police nightstick. What a terrible irony that in this year of celebration of

the Selma marches we are witnessing the resurgence of overt law enforcement brutality and injustice in Ferguson, Cleveland, New York City, and elsewhere, reminding us how far we still have to go. The continuing protests against unequal justice under the law by those enjoined to protect all of us and all of our children after the deaths of teenager Michael Brown, 12-year-old Tamir Rice, and others are a wake-up call about the deeply embedded systemic racism still

ing. Walk away from them. Stare them down. Make them unacceptable in our presence and in our institutions.

Through daily moral consciousness each of us has a responsibility to counter the proliferating voices of racial and moral and ethnic and religious division that are regaining respectability over our land. Let's face up to rather than ignore our growing racial problems which are America's historical and future Achilles' heel unless addressed firmly and courageously.

And let us all stand up right now to all those in our Congress, statehouses, and across our country who are trying to take away and suppress the right to vote and who are refusing to honor the sacrifice of all those who died to gain this fundamental American right. Shame on them and shame on us if we don't act to insist that Congress renew the Voting Rights Act without a minute's more delay. And shame on us if we do not stand up to all those who seek to turn the clock of racial progress backwards by denying equal justice under the law for all. We still have so far to go in our march to make America America—but we must march forward and never backwards.

Marian Wright Edelman is president of the Children's Defense Fund.

Security Means More than New and Bigger Guns

Risky war business

BY RICHARD KIRSCH



From the Islamic State to the streets of Paris, Americans get bombarded daily with fresh reminders of conflicts around the world. What's harder to figure out is what to do about it. What would actually make us safer?

Some politicians urge knee-jerk reactions. Spend more on the Pentagon, they say. But one thing's clear after years of over-relying on military force: It can actually make us less secure. You don't have to take my word for it.

When journalist Bob Schieffer asked recently if he had regrets about invading Iraq, for-

mer President George W. Bush lamented that "a violent group of people have risen — risen up again."

Bush can find one of the culprits for this sad development by looking in the mirror. Without that invasion and the sectarian chaos it unleashed, there would be no Islamic State (ISIS). What will it take for the U.S. government to grasp that short-term military solutions create long-term crises?

Sadly, our leaders remain hooked on military "solutions," which too often make the world more dangerous. In fact, President Barack Obama's 2016 funding request for the Pentagon's base budget is the biggest in U.S. history.

Total military expenditures,

including nuclear weapons and war spending, gobble up well over half of the nation's discretionary budget — even as we continue to draw down troops from Afghanistan. Much of that budget growth funds weapons systems unsuited to today's battlefields. Washington's spending billions to pad the pockets of Pentagon industry insiders who reap record profits while doing little to enhance national security.

The American people must demand a new definition of security — both at home and abroad — that means more than new and bigger guns.

In the Middle East, that means diplomatically engaging countries directly threatened by the Islamic State. It also means taking common sense steps — like providing economic and human-

itarian assistance — to address the "ISIS crisis" in a way that creates friends, not enemies.

"What matters more to American security?" Sen. Chris Murphy asked when funding for food assistance for Syrian refugees was running out. "One day of missiles being fired at ISIS inside Syria? Or being able to feed hundreds of thousands of hungry refugees, who, if they don't get a square meal... are going to turn to ISIS?"

Sadly, our leaders are better at finding money for weapons than for food. With budget priorities like that, we've got problems back home, too. Public investment in America's future — on roads, schools, and scientific research — is at historic lows. And the government has slashed spending on a wide range of vital programs that provide security and opportunity for American

families since 2010.

Last year, domestic discretionary spending fell by some \$15 billion, while the Pentagon used its massive slush fund — the Overseas Contingency Operations account — to escape any significant cuts at all.

As Congress ponders the federal budget, it must focus on what will really make our families more secure. Reining in wasteful Pentagon spending is one great way to get started. But cutting the security of Americans at home — including our education, health care, retirement, and child care — hits us where we live.

Richard Kirsch is a senior fellow at the Roosevelt Institute and the author of Fighting for Our Health: The Epic Battle to Make Health Care a Right in the United States.