

Name _____

Date _____

Biography: Amelia Boynton Robinson

Read the following biography. Annotate key words and sentences as you read. Place a question mark by a section you have a question about. Underline the important events in Amelia's life.

Early Life

Amelia Boynton Robinson was born as Amelia Isadora Platts in Savannah, Georgia on August 18, 1911. Her mother was a seamstress who volunteered in rural African American communities to promote women's suffrage, or the right to vote. The law allowing women to vote in the U.S. was passed in 1920. Amelia's mother would often take young Amelia with her to help register women to vote and accompany them to the polls to cast their vote. Her father was a construction worker who owned a wholesale wood lot. Amelia's parents encouraged their children to study and do well in school. Amelia went to Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, earning a degree in home economics in 1927.



Supporting the African American Community

After completing her studies, Amelia began working for the United States Department of Agriculture in Selma, Alabama. There she met and married Samuel William Boynton. They worked together in rural areas to teach African Americans better methods for farming. They also became interested in helping people to register to vote, get educated, and to own their own land. At that time, Jim Crow laws and customs often prevented African Americans from exercising their right to vote in elections. Jim Crow laws were state and local laws that enforced racial segregation, or the separation and discrimination of people based on their race.

In the mid-1930s, Amelia and her husband began working with the Dallas County Voters League. She came up with the phrase, "A Voteless People is a Hopeless People", and would put this phrase on signs when they marched or protested for equal rights for African Americans. Voter registration forms were often impossible to complete for those who were illiterate, or couldn't read. Amelia and her husband helped people and taught them how to fill out the forms so they could participate in elections.

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Political Activism

The Boyntons met Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1954 and got involved in the civil rights movement. Amelia and her husband frequently held meetings in their home for the movement. In addition to her activism in the civil rights movement, Amelia Boynton Robinson was a pioneer for her times. She ran for Congress in 1964 as the first African American woman candidate and the first woman to run for the Democratic Party in Alabama. Even though she did not win the election, it was still a historic moment for the country. She won eleven percent of votes, which was a big deal at the time, considering that only five percent of registered voters were black.

On March 7, 1965, Amelia helped organize a march from Selma to Montgomery to protest the discrimination against the black population. That day became known as Bloody Sunday because police beat the protesters during the march. Amelia, who was on the frontlines of the march, was beaten by police officers when crossing the Edmund Pettus bridge. She suffered throat burns from the tear gas used on the marchers. A picture of Amelia lying on the ground after being beaten was circulated around the country and helped raise awareness for the fight for equal rights for black people. The march, along with other events around that time, helped to bring about the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which was signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson on August 6. Amelia was the guest of honor at the signing. This law prohibits racial discrimination when it comes to people exercising their voting rights.

Amelia's Legacy

In 2014, Amelia's character was portrayed in a film entitled Selma, which told the story of the 1965 voting rights movement. This movie brought attention to this part of US history and specifically to Amelia's courage and perseverance. In 2015, Amelia crossed the Edmund Pettus Bridge again with President Barack Obama, on the fiftieth anniversary of Bloody Sunday, to celebrate her commitment to the struggle for freedom and justice for African Americans. She passed away in August of the same year at the age of 104. Amelia Boynton Robinson was an important female civil rights activist who continued the fight for equal rights throughout all of her life.

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After reading and annotating Amelia Boynton Robinson's biography, answer the following questions.

1. What is the main idea of this text?
2. How did Amelia's childhood influence her work as an adult? Use evidence from the text to support your claim.
3. Why do you think the author states that Amelia was "a pioneer for her times"?
4. Choose one of the lines you underlined in the text and explain why it is an important event in Amelia's life.
5. Write a question or an "I wonder..." statement about the biography.