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## Images of Selma

Helen Redmond reviews a photography exhibit that captures the struggle against Jim Crow segregation in Selma during one of the high points of the struggle.  
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Photography James Barker captures the exuberant youth on the Selma to Montgomery march in 1965

THE TIMING was perfect to mount an exhibition of photographs of the 1965 civil rights marches in Selma, Alabama. With the release of Ava DuVernay's feature film *Selma* and the national protests against the police killings of Mike Brown and Eric Garner, these photographs confront the viewer with the question: "How much has changed 50 years after the civil rights movement?"

The Steven Kasher Gallery has assembled photographs by Charles Moore, Spider Martin and James Barker in a show titled *Selma March 1965*. The exhibition offers a rare opportunity to see images from all sides of the conflict--from the civil rights activists to the heavily armed state troopers to the mobs of angry white racists.

Some of the most compelling images depict the war of words that ended up on pickets, cars and billboards.

On the side of desegregation is a photo of a man holding a sign that says "Civil Men for Civil Rights"; a contingent of marchers from Hawaii wear leis and carry a banner declaring

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"Hawaii Knows Integration Works"; and a smiling child clutching a sign that saying "Integration for One, Integration for All." Another photo shows the back of a Black man's blue jean jacket, embossed with the Confederate flag, but with the angry words "Alabama God Damn," in reference to the Nina Simone song.

On the side of Jim Crow segregation, the three photographers capture the unabashed, vile racism of Southern whites. One photo of a picket asks "Who Needs Niggers," another asserts "Civil Rights are Un-Constitutional." A billboard displays a photo of Martin Luther King with the caption "Martin Luther King at Communist Training School." The most shocking and sickening image is of an automobile full of young men who have scribbled words of racist hate and violent threats all over the car: "Niggers go home," "Go Home Coonsville USA," "Open season on niggers" and "Cheap Ammo here."

Several of Charles Moore's photographs are of Martin Luther King and his wife Coretta Scott King. They are shown handsomely dressed, smiling and walking down sidewalks and streets. Another image is more intimate, with the two embracing. Coretta Scott King wears dark sunglasses and MLK sports a wide-brimmed fedora with a black band. They look like rock stars.

There are prints of important figures associated with the civil rights struggle--Pete Seeger serving food to marchers and Harry Belafonte and Joan Baez singing together on stage.

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SPIDER MARTIN'S photographs capture the sheer brutality of the state troopers when marchers tried to cross the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma the first time. One of his most powerful and frightening shots captures the moment just before the police in helmets, their faces covered by ghoulish gas masks and wielding truncheons, attack. The confrontation is known as Bloody Sunday.

In another picture, there's a searing, iconic image that juxtaposes organizer Amelia Boynton being lifted to her feet after being beaten unconscious, against the background of a restaurant that advertises custard and barbeque. Other photos display what can only be described as images from a war zone: Clouds of tear gas enveloping marchers, bodies

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strewn along a grassy divider strip, police trampling and beating defenseless people who are retreating back over the bridge.

In a picture that speaks volumes, a close-up, side-angle portrait of a state trooper shows his white helmet emblazoned with the Confederate flag and the thick barrel of a shotgun. He looks like a pig.

Fast forward to Ferguson 50 years later. The pictures of the confrontation between marchers and state troopers on the Pettus Bridge are eerily reminiscent of those between protesters and the militarized police force in Ferguson during the marches to protest the killing of 18-year-old Mike Brown.

James Barker's photographs illustrate a different aspect of the civil rights movement and a much-needed one. His unframed, black-and-white photos capture ordinary moments in the struggle for freedom. They have never been shown in a major art gallery. At the opening reception, I asked Barker why he shot only in black-and-white, and he replied, "Color complicates things."

His prints show people doing the tedious logistical work of organizing. Civil rights activists from that era, as well as activists today, will appreciate Barker's photographs because the unglamorous, behind-the-scenes work that is essential to pull off an event is so often left out of exhibitions.

In one image, a church is so packed with people that dozens have to sit on the floor or stand. A young Black man is at the podium, speaking about the march to an interracial audience that is at rapt attention. The shot is a slap in the face to segregation. It's hard to believe now, but Blacks and whites sitting together in the south in 1965 was extraordinary and dangerous.

A lot of food preparation, planning and political discussion took place in dark, cold church basements. In a great photo, young and old, Black and white sit around a wood table talking in the basement of Selma's Brown Chapel. Another image shows a young boy carrying a box of evaporated milk surrounded by cartons overflowing with cans of Campbell's chicken noodle soup. The marchers had to be fed. And they had to rest.

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Barker's camera shows the Spartan conditions that activists endured. There are photos of people sleeping four to a room on the floor with just blankets, no beds or pillows.

Before the Internet, Twitter and cell phones, message boards were vital for communication. Barker has a close-up shot of a board that displays simple messages: "Stu Powell call your mother," "Father Cowan--leaving at 11 for Montgomery, leaving from 1st Baptist, room for 3 + baggage."

One of Barker's most beautiful photographs is of young people celebrating the successful march from Selma to Montgomery. With their arms casually slung over each other's shoulders, triumphant and defiant looks on their faces, they stride toward the camera. The image, dense with meaning and emotion, insists that Black lives matter--50 years before there was a hashtag.

This is a rare exhibition that brings together dozens of remarkable photographs which graphically illustrate one of the most important chapters in the civil rights movement. You don't want to miss it.