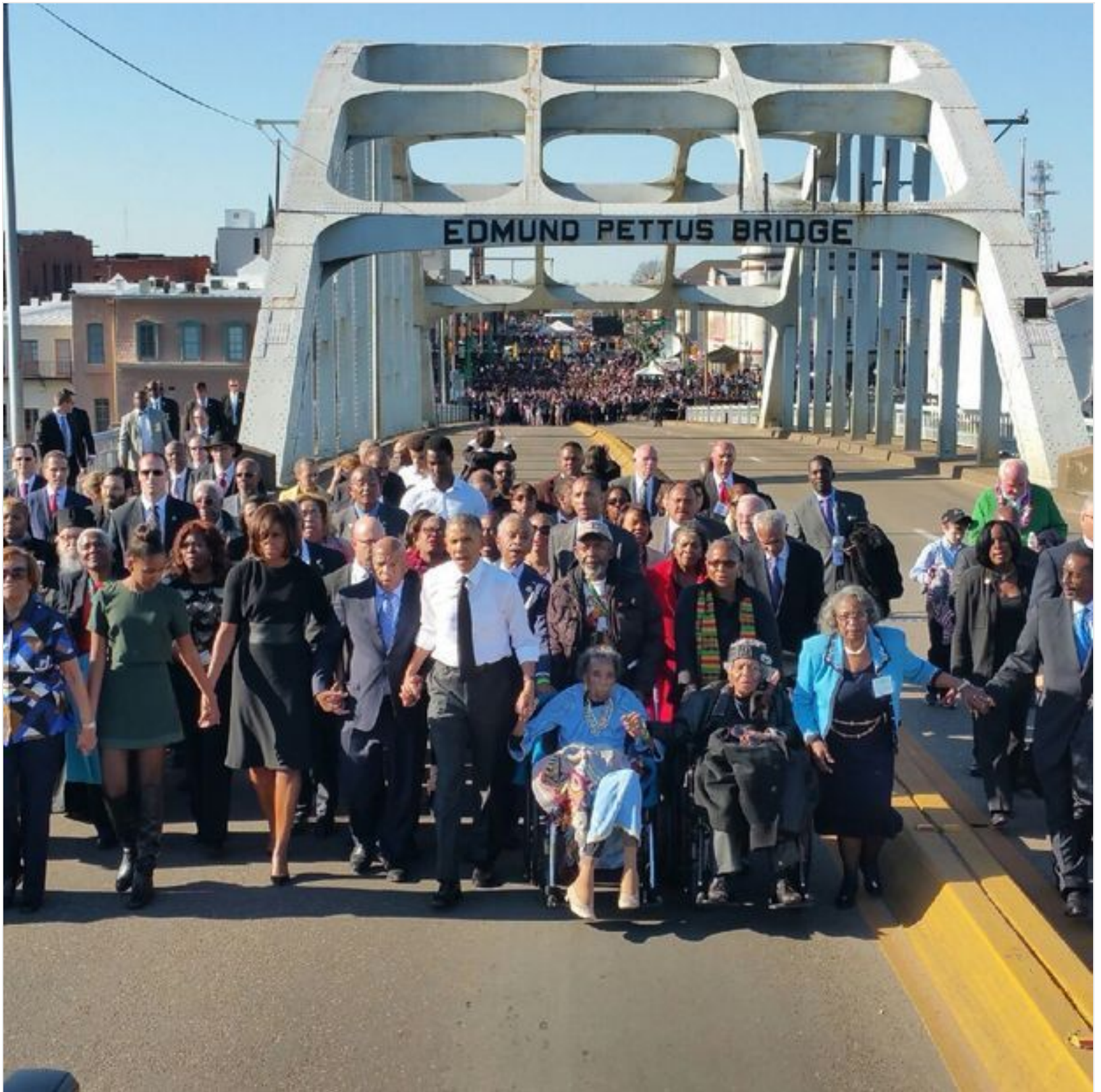


Amelia Boynton shook the world, leaves a giant legacy



By **Guest opinion**

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By **Sen. Hank Sanders (D-Selma)**

A giant named Amelia Platts Boynton Robinson passed Tuesday night, August 25, 2015. She was 110 years old. I saw her driver's license when I visited her just three days before she passed. It read, *DOB August 18, 1905*. She was 110 years old although many said that she was 104 years of age.

The really powerful thing was not her passing in death but that she was a giant as she passed our way in life. As she passed our way she was a giant in the struggle for voting and human rights. This giant of a woman was affectionately called Mother Amelia Boynton because she was the mother of the modern day Voting Rights Movement. She was born Amelia Platts and married three times, outliving each husband. To most, she was Mrs. Amelia Boynton. She and her first husband, Samuel Boynton, registered and voted in Selma during the early 1930s. What made them giants was not that they registered and voted but that they risked their very lives to organize other African Americans to register to vote, to vote and to purchase land so they could be independent and therefore respected citizens of this city, state and country. They risked their lives by continuously organizing in the dangerous 30s, 40s, 50s and 60s.

Mother Amelia Boynton was a giant passing our way, turning her husband's funeral into a mass meeting for voting rights when no church in Selma would allow a mass meeting in 1963. They were fearful of church burnings and bombings.

Mother Amelia Boynton was a giant passing our way, risking her life by allowing the first SNCC organizers in Selma to initially stay at her home. She openly worked with these outside community organizers knowing full well that this made her a marked woman and her home a marked place.

Mother Amelia Boynton was a giant passing our way, holding meetings of the Courageous Eight, of which she was a member, in her home in spite of a court order prohibiting three or more persons from meeting anywhere in Selma, Dallas County concerning voting or civil rights. She risked jail for contempt of court, but she daily risked her life for freedom.

Whether or not Amelia Platts Boynton Robinson is further recognized, a giant certainly passed our way.

Mother Amelia Boynton was a giant passing our way as she wrote a solitary letter inviting Dr. Martin Luther King to Selma in 1963 and subsequently writing a second with other members of the Courageous Eight specifically inviting Dr. King to come to Selma for a voting rights mass meeting. Dr. King would not come any place without an open invitation, and these invitations were violations of the court injunction.

Mother Amelia Boynton was a giant passing our way, risking her life along with 600 others on the Edmund Pettus Bridge on Bloody Sunday, March 7, 1965. She was knocked unconscious and left for dead. But she lived and continued to serve for another 50 years. She was one of only two women who marched the entire 54 miles on the Selma-to-Montgomery March from March 21 to March 25, 1965.

Mother Amelia Boynton was a giant passing our way, laying the foundation which culminated in the 1965 Voting Rights Act, the legislation that made the United States of America a real democracy for the first time. President Lyndon Baines Johnson made sure that she was present when he signed the 1965 Voting Rights Act.

Mother Amelia Boynton was a giant passing our way, commencing voting rights work with her mother in her early teens and continuing with voting and other human rights work for nearly 100 years, right up until a month or so before she passed. She was a founding member of the National Voting Rights Museum and the Bridge Crossing Jubilee, which continue her voting rights legacy.

Yes, a giant passed our way. Now, she has passed from this earth. However, she left clear footprints so we can follow. She left clear examples of active courage and long-term commitment to inspire us. She left proud accomplishments on which we must build.

Her life and work were recently celebrated in the play, *Selma the Musical*. There was also a campaign urging President Barack Obama to award her the Presidential Medal of Freedom while she was still passing our way. Perhaps it will still be awarded in her death to further lift her so others can better see the way to freedom. Many are asking that the Edmund Pettus Bridge, now named after a Grand Dragon of the Ku Klux Klan, be renamed the Amelia Boynton Robinson Bridge.

Whether or not Amelia Platts Boynton Robinson is further recognized, a giant certainly passed our way. She lifted others as she passed, and she leaves a bright light so others can see the path to follow to freedom.