

Black in Selma is the expansive autobiography of J. L. Chestnut Jr., a key figure of the civil rights movement in Selma, Alabama. Born in Selma in 1930, Chestnut left home to study law at Howard University in Washington, DC. Returning to Selma, Chestnut was the town's first and only African American attorney in the late 1950s. As the turbulent struggle for civil rights spread across the South, Chestnut became an active and assiduous promoter of social and legal equality in his hometown. A key player on the local and state fronts, Chestnut accrued deep insights into the racial tensions in his community and deftly opened paths toward a more equitable future. Though intimately involved in many events that took place in Selma, Chestnut was nevertheless often identified in history books as simply a local attorney. Black in Selma reveals his powerful yet little-known story. In the 2014 film Selma, director Ava DuVernay takes audiences to the climactic confrontation between civil rights advocates and the state's security forces of March 1965. Readers looking for a deeper understanding of the events that preceded that epic moment, as well as how racial integration unfolded in Selma in the decades that followed, will find Chestnut's story and memories both a vital primary source and an inspiration.

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