

# *One of Michigan's Own: Viola Liuzzo—An Exemplary Woman in Extraordinary Times*

This exhibition chronicles the life of one woman—Viola Liuzzo—in extraordinary times.

Nearly everyone has heard of James Earl Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael “Mickey” Schwerner. All three were shot at close range by members of the Mississippi White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan on June 21, 1964. Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner had been working on the “Freedom Summer” campaign—attempting to register African Americans across the South to vote.

Viola Liuzzo was the only white woman murdered in the civil rights movement—yet we hear so little about her. She was a 39 year old Detroit teamster’s wife and mother of five, who in 1965 joined thousands of people converging on Selma, Alabama, for the March on Montgomery led by Martin Luther King, Jr. But shortly after the historic Voting Rights March ended, Liuzzo was shot in the head and killed by a car full of Klansmen while she drove on a deserted highway.

Liuzzo’s death came at a pivotal moment in the civil rights movement, when President Lyndon Johnson had been fighting an uphill battle to push the Voting Rights Act through Congress. Her murder is attributed by historians of the era as providing the final piece of leverage that won Johnson Congress’s approval of the Act, which forever changed our political landscape.

The 2004 film *Home of the Brave* documents that immediately after her murder, Liuzzo became the target of a smear campaign mounted by J. Edgar Hoover and the FBI to divert attention from the fact that a key FBI informant was in the car with Liuzzo’s killers. This discrediting of her name—mostly based on her gender and wholly unfounded—succeeded in erasing Viola Liuzzo from our cultural memory. After delving through thousands of pages of government documents and filming interviews with leaders in the fields of politics, history, and forensics psychology, the *Home of the Brave* filmmakers shed a new light on this complicated, buried story. This exhibition helps bring back memories of one of our own: Detroit’s Viola Liuzzo.

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*Home of the Brave* will be shown at MSU Law from 6:00 to 7:30 p.m. on Thursday, April 3, 2014.

Sponsors: MSU College of Law, MSU College of Law Diversity Services Office, and Michigan Women’s Hall of Fame