

John Lewis (civil rights leader)

John Robert Lewis (February 21, 1940 – July 17, 2020) was an American politician and civil rights leader who served in the United States House of Representatives for Georgia's 5th congressional district from 1987 until his death in 2020. A member of the Democratic Party, Lewis served as the Chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) from 1963 to 1966.

Lewis, who as SNCC chairman, was one of the "Big Six" leaders of groups who organized the 1963 March on Washington and played many key roles in the civil rights movement and its actions to end legalized racial segregation in the United States.

Lewis was first elected to Congress in 1986 and served for 17 terms in the U.S. House of Representatives. He was also the dean of the Georgia congressional delegation. The district he served includes the northern three-quarters of Atlanta.

He became a leader of the Democratic Party in the U.S. House of Representatives, serving from 1991 as a Chief Deputy Whip and from 2003 as Senior Chief Deputy Whip. He received many honorary degrees and awards, including the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Contents

Early life

Student activism and SNCC

- Nashville Student Movement
- Freedom Rides
- SNCC Chairmanship

Field Foundation, SRC, and VEP (1966–1977)

Early work in government

U.S. House of Representatives

- Elections
 - 1986
 - 1988–2018

Tenure

- Overview
- Protests

John Lewis



Member of the U.S. House of Representatives from Georgia's 5th district

In office

January 3, 1987 – July 17, 2020

Preceded by Wyche Fowler

Succeeded by Vacant

3rd Chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee

In office

June 1963 – May 1966

Preceded by Charles McDew

Succeeded by Stokely Carmichael

Personal details

Born John Robert Lewis
February 21, 1940
Troy, Alabama, U.S.

Died July 17, 2020 (aged 80)
Atlanta, Georgia, U.S.

Cause of death Pancreatic cancer

Political party Democratic

Spouse(s) Lillian Miles
(m. 1968; died 2012)

2008 presidential election
2016 firearm safety legislation sit-in
National Museum of African American
History and Culture
2016 presidential election

Committee assignments
Caucus memberships

Biographies

March
Run

Personal life

Death

Honors

Honorary academic degrees

Electoral history

In popular culture

Bibliography

See also

References

Further reading

External links

Children	John-Miles Lewis
Education	American Baptist College (BA) Fisk University (BA)

Early life

John Lewis was born on February 21, 1940, in Troy, Alabama, the third of ten children of Willie Mae (née Carter) and Eddie Lewis.^{[1][2]} His parents were sharecroppers^[3] in rural Pike County, Alabama.^[4]

As a young child, Lewis had little interaction with white people; by the time he was six, Lewis had seen only two white people in his life.^[5] As he grew older he began taking trips into town with his family, where he experienced racism and segregation, such as at the public library in Troy.^{[6][7][8]} Lewis had relatives who lived in northern cities, and he learned from them that the North had integrated schools, buses, and businesses. When Lewis was 11, an uncle took him on a trip to Buffalo, New York, making him more acutely aware of Troy's segregation.^[9]

In 1955, Lewis first heard Martin Luther King Jr. on the radio,^[10] and he closely followed King's Montgomery bus boycott later that year.^[11] Lewis met Rosa Parks when he was 17, and met King for the first time when he was 18.^[12]

Student activism and SNCC

Nashville Student Movement

Lewis graduated from the American Baptist Theological Seminary in Nashville, Tennessee, and then received a bachelor's degree in religion and philosophy from Fisk University. As a student, he was dedicated to the civil rights movement. He organized sit-ins at segregated lunch counters in Nashville and took part in many other civil rights activities as part of the Nashville Student Movement. The Nashville sit-in movement was responsible for the desegregation of lunch counters in downtown Nashville. Lewis was arrested and jailed many times in the nonviolent movement to desegregate the downtown area of the city.^[13] He was also instrumental in organizing bus boycotts and other nonviolent protests in the fight for voter and racial equality.

While a student, Lewis was invited to attend nonviolence workshops held at Clark Memorial United Methodist Church by the Rev. James Lawson and Rev. Kelly Miller Smith. There, Lewis and other students became dedicated adherents to the discipline and philosophy of nonviolence, which he practiced for the rest of his life.^[14]

Freedom Rides

In 1961, Lewis became one of the 13 original Freedom Riders.^{[3][15]} There were seven whites and six blacks who were determined to ride from Washington, D.C. to New Orleans in an integrated fashion. At that time, several southern states continued to enforce laws prohibiting black and white riders from sitting next to each other on public transportation. The Freedom Ride, originated by the Fellowship of Reconciliation and revived by James Farmer and Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), was initiated to pressure the federal government to enforce the Supreme Court decision in Boynton v. Virginia (1960) that declared segregated interstate bus travel to be unconstitutional. The Freedom Rides also exposed the passivity of the government regarding violence against citizens of the country who were simply acting in accordance with the law.^[16] The federal government had trusted the notoriously racist Alabama police to protect the Riders, but did nothing itself, except to have FBI agents take notes. The Kennedy Administration then called for a cooling-off period, with a moratorium on Freedom Rides.^[17]

In the South, Lewis and other nonviolent Freedom Riders were beaten by angry mobs, arrested at times and taken to jail. At age 21, Lewis was the first of the Freedom Riders to be assaulted while in Rock Hill, South Carolina. He tried to enter a whites-only waiting room and two white men attacked him, injuring his face and kicking him in the ribs. Nevertheless, only two weeks later Lewis joined a Freedom Ride that was bound for Jackson, Mississippi. "We were determined not to let any act of violence keep us from our goal. We knew our lives could be threatened, but we had made up our minds not to turn back," Lewis said towards the end of his life in regard to his perseverance following the act of violence.^[18] Lewis was also imprisoned for 40 days in the Mississippi State Penitentiary in Sunflower County, Mississippi, after participating in a Freedom Riders activity in that state.^[19]

In an interview with CNN during the 40th anniversary of the Freedom Rides, Lewis recounted the amount of violence he and the 12 other original Freedom Riders endured. In Birmingham, the Riders were beaten with baseball bats, chains, lead pipes, and stones. They were arrested by police who led them across the border



Civil rights leaders meet with President John F. Kennedy after the March on Washington, 1963. Lewis is fourth from left.



Play media

This is video footage of President Clinton delivering remarks a dinner honoring Representative John Lewis.

into Tennessee and let them go. They reorganized and rode to Montgomery where they were met with more violence,^[20] and Lewis was hit in the head with a wooden crate. "It was very violent. I thought I was going to die. I was left lying at the Greyhound bus station in Montgomery unconscious," said Lewis, remembering the incident.^[21] When CORE gave up on the Freedom Ride because of the violence, Lewis and fellow activist Diane Nash arranged for the Nashville students to take it over and bring it to a successful conclusion.^{[22][23][23]}

In February 2009, 48 years after he was bloodied in a Greyhound station during a Freedom Ride, Lewis received a nationally televised apology from a white southerner and former Klansman Elwin Wilson.^{[24][25]}

SNCC Chairmanship



Leaders of the March on Washington, 1963. Lewis is second from right.

In 1963, when Charles McDew stepped down as chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), Lewis, one of the founding members of SNCC, was elected to take over.^{[26][27]} Lewis's experience at that point was already widely respected. His courage and his tenacious adherence to the philosophy of reconciliation and nonviolence made him emerge as a leader. By this time, he had been arrested 24 times in the nonviolent movement for equal justice.^[28] He served as chairman until 1966.^[29] During his tenure, SNCC opened Freedom Schools, launched the Mississippi Freedom Summer,^[30] and organized some of the voter registration efforts during the 1965 Selma voting rights campaign.^[31] As the chairman of SNCC, Lewis had written a speech in reaction to the 1963 Civil Rights Bill. The planned speech denounced the bill because it did not protect African Americans against police brutality or provide African Americans with the right to vote, describing it as "too little and too late." But when copies of the speech were distributed on August 27, other chairs of the march insisted that it be

revised. James Forman re-wrote Lewis's speech on a portable typewriter in a small anteroom behind Lincoln's statue during the program. SNCC's initial assertion "we cannot support, wholeheartedly the [Kennedy] civil rights bill" was replaced with "We support it with great reservations."^[32]

In 1963, as chairman of SNCC Lewis was named one of the "Big Six" leaders who were organizing the March on Washington, the occasion of Dr. Martin Luther King's celebrated "I Have a Dream" speech, along with Whitney Young, A. Philip Randolph, James Farmer and Roy Wilkins; Lewis was the youngest of the Big Six. Lewis also spoke at the March. Discussing the occasion, historian Howard Zinn wrote: "At the great Washington March of 1963, the chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), John Lewis, speaking to the same enormous crowd that heard Martin Luther King's I Have a Dream speech, was prepared to ask the right question: 'Which side is the federal government on?' That sentence was eliminated from his speech by organizers of the March to avoid offending the Kennedy Administration. But Lewis and his fellow SNCC workers had experienced, again and again, the strange passivity of the national government in the face of Southern violence."^[17] At 23 he was the youngest speaker that day, and, at the time of his death, he was the last remaining living speaker.^[33]

In 1964, Lewis coordinated SNCC's efforts for "Mississippi Freedom Summer", a campaign to register black voters across the South and expose college students from around the country to the perils of African-American life in the South. Lewis traveled the country encouraging students to spend their summer break trying to help people in Mississippi, the most recalcitrant state in the union, to register and vote.^[34] Lewis became nationally known during his prominent role in the Selma to Montgomery marches when, on March 7, 1965 – a day that would become known as "Bloody Sunday" – Lewis and fellow activist Hosea Williams

led over 600 marchers across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama. At the end of the bridge, they were met by Alabama State Troopers who ordered them to disperse. When the marchers stopped to pray, the police discharged tear gas and mounted troopers charged the demonstrators, beating them with night sticks. Lewis's skull was fractured, but he escaped across the bridge to Brown Chapel, a church in Selma which also served as the movement's headquarters.^[35] Lewis bore scars on his head from the incident for the rest of his life.^[36]



Lewis in 1964

Field Foundation, SRC, and VEP (1966–1977)

In 1966, Lewis moved to New York City to take a job as the associate director of the Field Foundation.^{[37][38]} He was there a little over a year before moving back to Atlanta to direct the Southern Regional Council's Community Organization Project.^{[39][38]} During his time with the SRC, he completed his degree from Fisk University.^[40]

In 1970, Lewis became the director of the Voter Education Project (VEP), a position he held until 1977.^[41] Though initially a project of the Southern Regional Council, the VEP became an independent organization in 1971.^[42] Despite difficulties caused by the 1973–1975 recession,^[42] the VEP added nearly four million minority voters to the rolls under Lewis' leadership.^[43] During his tenure, the VEP expanded its mission, including running Voter Mobilization Tours.^[42]

Early work in government

In January 1977, incumbent Democratic U.S. Congressman Andrew Young of Georgia's 5th congressional district resigned in order to become the U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. under President Jimmy Carter. In the March 1977 open primary, Atlanta City Councilman Wyche Fowler ranked first with 40% of the vote, failing to reach the 50% threshold to win outright. Lewis ranked second with 29% of the vote.^[44] In the April election, Fowler defeated Lewis 62%–38%.^[45]

After his unsuccessful bid for Congress in 1977, Lewis accepted a position with the Carter administration as associate director of ACTION, responsible for running the VISTA program, the Retired Senior Volunteer Program, and the Foster Grandparent Program. He held that job for two and a half years, resigning as the 1980 election approached.^[46]

In 1981, Lewis ran for an at-large seat on the Atlanta City Council. He won with 69% of the vote,^[47] and served on the council until 1986.^[48]

U.S. House of Representatives

Elections

1986

After nine years as a member of the U.S. House of Representatives, Fowler gave up the seat to make a successful run for the U.S. Senate. Lewis decided to run for the 5th district again. In the August Democratic primary, where a victory was considered tantamount to election, State Representative Julian Bond ranked first with 47%, just three points shy of winning outright. Lewis finished in second place with 35%.^[49] In the run-off, Lewis pulled an upset against Bond, defeating him 52% to 48%.^[50] The race was said to have "badly strained relations in Atlanta's black community" as many Black leaders had supported Bond over Lewis.^[51] Lewis was "endorsed by the Atlanta newspapers and a favorite of the white liberal establishment".^[52] His victory was due to strong results among white voters (a minority in the district).^[52] During the campaign, he ran advertisements accusing Bond of corruption, implying that Bond used cocaine, and suggesting that Bond had lied about his civil rights activism.^[52]



Lewis greets President Ronald Reagan and First Lady Nancy Reagan in 1987

In the November general election, Lewis defeated Republican Portia Scott 75% to 25%.^[53]

1988–2018

Lewis was reelected 16 times, dropping below 70 percent of the vote in the general election only once in 1994, when he defeated Republican Dale Dixon by a 38-point margin, 69%–31%.^[54] He ran unopposed in 1996,^[55] 2004,^[56] 2006,^[57] and 2008,^[58] and again in 2014 and 2018.^{[59][60]}

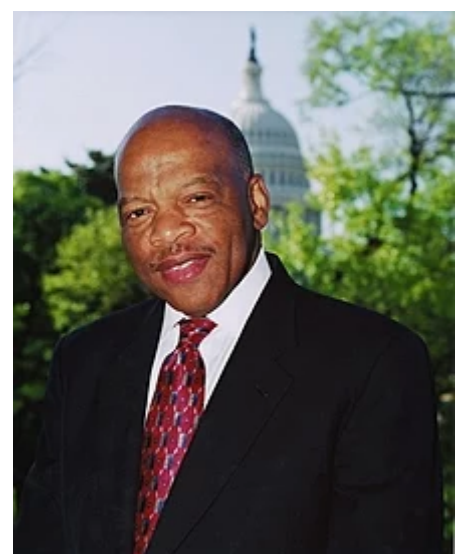
He was challenged in the Democratic primary just twice: in 1992 and 2008. In 1992, he defeated State Representative Mable Thomas 76%–24%.^[61] In 2008, Thomas decided to challenge Lewis again, as well and Markel Hutchins also contested the race. Lewis defeated Hutchins and Thomas 69%–16%–15%.^[62]

Tenure

Overview

Lewis represented Georgia's 5th congressional district, one of the most consistently Democratic districts in the nation. Since its formalization in 1845, the district has been represented by a Democrat for all but the nine years the seat was vacant when Georgia seceded during the Civil War.^[63]

Lewis was one of the most liberal members of the House, and one of the most liberal congressmen to have represented a district in the Deep South. He was categorized as a "Hard-Core Liberal" by On the Issues.^[64] The Washington Post described Lewis in 1998 as "a fiercely partisan Democrat but ... also fiercely independent."^[65] Lewis characterized himself as a strong and adamant liberal.^[65] The Atlanta Journal-Constitution said Lewis was the "only former major civil rights leader who extended his fight for human rights and racial reconciliation to the halls of Congress."^[66] The Atlanta Journal-Constitution also said that to "those who know him, from U.S. senators to 20-something congressional aides," he is called the



An official portrait of Lewis

"conscience of Congress."^[66] Lewis cited Florida Senator and later Representative Claude Pepper, a staunch liberal, as being the colleague that he most admired.^[67] Lewis also spoke out in support of gay rights and national health insurance.^[65]

Lewis opposed the 1991 Gulf War,^{[68][69]} and the 2000 U.S. trade agreement with China that passed the House.^[70] He opposed the Clinton administration on NAFTA and welfare reform.^[65] After welfare reform passed, Lewis was described as outraged; he said, "Where is the sense of decency? What does it profit a great nation to conquer the world, only to lose its soul?"^[71] In 1994, when Clinton was considering invading Haiti, Lewis, in contrast to the Congressional Black Caucus as a whole, opposed armed intervention.^[72] When Clinton did send troops to Haiti, Lewis called for supporting the troops and called the intervention a "mission of peace".^[73] In 1998, when Clinton was considering a military strike against Iraq, Lewis said he would back the president if American forces were ordered into action.^[74] In 2001, three days after the September 11 attacks, Lewis voted to give President George W. Bush authority to use force against the perpetrators of 9/11 in a vote that was 420–1; Lewis called it probably one of his toughest votes.^[75] In 2002, he sponsored the Peace Tax Fund bill, a conscientious objection to military taxation initiative that had been reintroduced yearly since 1972.^[76] Lewis was a "fierce partisan critic of President Bush", and an early opponent of the Iraq war.^{[66][77]} The Associated Press said he was "the first major House figure to suggest impeaching George W. Bush," arguing that the president "deliberately, systematically violated the law" in authorizing the National Security Agency to conduct wiretaps without a warrant. Lewis said, "He is not king, he is president."^[78]

Lewis drew on his historical involvement in the Civil Rights Movement as part of his politics. He made an annual pilgrimage to Alabama to retrace the route he marched in 1965 from Selma to Montgomery – a route Lewis worked to make part of the Historic National Trails program. That trip became "one of the hottest tickets in Washington among lawmakers, Republican and Democrat, eager to associate themselves with Lewis and the movement. 'We don't deliberately set out to win votes, but it's very helpful,' Lewis said of the trip".^[66] In recent years, however, Faith and Politics Institute drew criticism for selling seats on the trip to lobbyists for at least \$25,000 each.^[79] According to the Center for Public Integrity, even Lewis said that he would feel "much better" if the institute's funding came from churches and foundations instead of corporations.^[79]

On June 3, 2011, the House passed a resolution 268–145, calling for a withdrawal of the United States military from the air and naval operations in and around Libya.^[80] Lewis voted against the resolution.^[81]

Protests

In January 2001, Lewis boycotted the inauguration of George W. Bush by staying in his Atlanta district. He did not attend the swearing-in because he did not believe Bush was the true elected president.^[82]

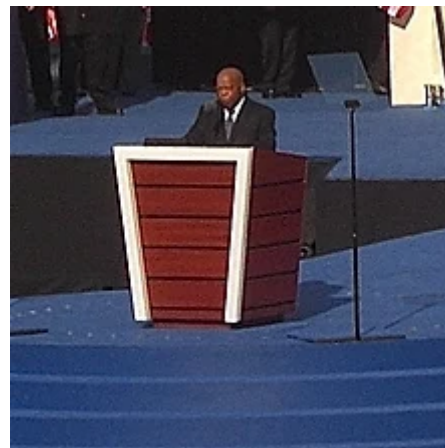
In March 2003, Lewis spoke to a crowd of 30,000 in Oregon during an anti-war protest before the start of the Iraq War.^[83] He was arrested in 2006^[84] and 2009 and outside the Sudan embassy in protest against the genocide in Darfur.^[85] He was one of eight U.S. Representatives, from six states, arrested while holding a sit-in near the west side of the U.S. Capitol building, to advocate for immigration reform.^[86] Lewis also led the 2016 House Democrats sit-in demanding that the House take action on gun control in the wake of the Orlando nightclub shooting and the failure of the United States Senate to act.^[87]

2008 presidential election

At first, Lewis supported Hillary Clinton, endorsing her presidential campaign on October 12, 2007.^[88] On February 14, 2008, however, he announced he was considering withdrawing his support from Clinton and might instead cast his superdelegate vote for Barack Obama: "Something is happening in America and

people are prepared and ready to make that great leap."^[89] Ben Smith of Politico said that "it would be a seminal moment in the race if John Lewis were to switch sides."^[90]

On February 27, 2008, Lewis formally changed his support and endorsed Obama.^{[91][92]} After Obama clinched the Democratic nomination for president, Lewis said "If someone had told me this would be happening now, I would have told them they were crazy, out of their mind, they didn't know what they were talking about ... I just wish the others were around to see this day. ... To the people who were beaten, put in jail, were asked questions they could never answer to register to vote, it's amazing."^[93] Despite switching his support to Obama, Lewis' support of Clinton for several months led to criticism from his constituents. One of his challengers in the House primary election set up campaign headquarters inside the building that served as Obama's Georgia office.^[94]



Lewis speaks during the final day of the 2008 Democratic National Convention in Denver, Colorado.

In October 2008, Lewis issued a statement criticizing the campaign of John McCain and Sarah Palin and accusing them of "sowing the seeds of hatred and division" in a way that brought to mind the late Gov. George Wallace and "another destructive period" in American political history. McCain said he was "saddened" by the criticism from "a man I've always admired," and called on Obama to repudiate Lewis's statement. Obama responded to the statement, saying that he "does not believe that John McCain or his policy criticism is in any way comparable to George Wallace or his segregationist policies."^[95] Lewis later issued a follow-up statement clarifying that he had not compared McCain and Palin to Wallace himself, but rather that his earlier statement was a "reminder to all Americans that toxic language can lead to destructive behavior."^[96]

On an African American being elected president, he said:

If you ask me whether the election ... is the fulfillment of Dr. King's dream, I say, "No, it's just a down payment." There's still too many people 50 years later, there's still too many people that are being left out and left behind.^[97]

2016 firearm safety legislation sit-in

On June 22, 2016, House Democrats, led by Lewis and Massachusetts Representative Katherine Clark, began a sit-in demanding House Speaker Paul Ryan allow a vote on gun-safety legislation in the aftermath of the Orlando nightclub shooting. Speaker *pro tempore* Daniel Webster ordered the House into recess, but Democrats refused to leave the chamber for nearly 26 hours.^[98]



House Democrats, led by Lewis, take the floor to begin a sit-in demanding gun safety legislation on June 22, 2016

National Museum of African American History and Culture

In 1988, the year after he was sworn into Congress, Lewis introduced a bill to create a national African American museum in Washington. The bill failed and for 15 years he continued to introduce it with each new congress, but each time it was blocked in the Senate, largely by conservative Southern Senator Jesse Helms. In 2002, Helms did not seek reelection, Lewis gained bipartisan support, and

in 2003 President George W. Bush signed the bill to establish the museum, with the Smithsonian's Board of Regents to establish the location. The National Museum of African American History and Culture, located adjacent to the Washington Memorial, held its opening ceremony on September 25, 2016.^[99]

2016 presidential election

Lewis supported Hillary Clinton in the 2016 Democratic presidential primaries against Bernie Sanders. Regarding Sanders' role in the civil rights movement, Lewis remarked "To be very frank, I never saw him, I never met him. I chaired the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee for three years, from 1963 to 1966. I was involved in sit-ins, in the Freedom Rides, the March on Washington, the March from Selma to Montgomery... but I met Hillary Clinton". Former Congressman and Hawaii Governor Neil Abercrombie wrote a letter to Lewis expressing his disappointment with Lewis's comments on Sanders. Lewis later clarified his statement, saying "During the late '50s and '60s when I was more engaged, [Sanders] was not there. I did not see him around. I have never seen him in the South. But if he was there, if he was involved someplace, I was not aware of it."^{[100][101]}



John Lewis at the 2017 Women's March in Atlanta

In a January 2016 interview, Lewis compared Donald Trump, then the Republican front-runner, to former Governor George Wallace: "I've been around a while and Trump reminds me so much of a lot of the things that George Wallace said and did. I think demagogues are pretty dangerous, really... We shouldn't divide people, we shouldn't separate people."^[102]

On January 13, 2017, during an interview with NBC's Chuck Todd for Meet the Press, Lewis stated: "I don't see the president-elect as a legitimate president."^[103] He added, "I think the Russians participated in having this man get elected, and they helped destroy the candidacy of Hillary Clinton. I don't plan to attend the Inauguration. I think there was a conspiracy on the part of the Russians, and others, that helped him get elected. That's not right. That's not fair. That's not the open, democratic process."^[104] Trump replied on Twitter the following day, suggesting that Lewis should "spend more time on fixing and helping his district, which is in horrible shape and falling apart (not to [...] mention crime infested) rather than falsely complaining about the election results," and accusing Lewis of being "All talk, talk, talk – no action or results. Sad!"^[105] Trump's statement about Lewis' district was rated as "Mostly False" by PolitiFact,^[106] and he was criticized for attacking a civil rights leader such as John Lewis, especially one who was brutally beaten for the cause, and especially on Martin Luther King weekend.^{[107][108][109]} Senator John McCain acknowledged Lewis as "an American hero" but criticized him, saying: "this is not the first time that Congressman Lewis has taken a very extreme stand and condemned without any shred of evidence for doing so an incoming president of the United States. This is a stain on Congressman Lewis' reputation – no one else's."^[110] The New York Post noted that Lewis used the "same unfounded, cookie-cutter personal attacks against Republican after Republican".^[111]

A few days later, Lewis said that he would not attend Trump's inauguration because he did not believe that Trump was the true elected president. "It will be the first (inauguration) that I miss since I've been in Congress. You cannot be at home with something that you feel that is wrong, is not right," he said. Lewis had failed to attend George W. Bush's inauguration in 2001 because he believed that he too was not a legitimately elected president. Lewis' statement was rated as "Pants on Fire" by PolitiFact.^{[112][113][114]}

Committee assignments

Lewis served on the following Congressional committees at the time of his death:^[115]

- Committee on Ways and Means
 - Subcommittee on Oversight (Chair)
- United States Congress Joint Committee on Taxation

Caucus memberships

Lewis was a member of over 40 caucuses, including:^[116]

- Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) Caucus (Co-Chair)
- Congressional Structured Settlements Caucus (Co-Chair)
- Congressional Black Caucus
- Congressional Progressive Caucus^[117]
- Congressional Brazil Caucus^[116]
- Congressional Arts Caucus^[118]

In 1991, Lewis became the senior chief deputy whip in the Democratic caucus.^[119]

Biographies

Lewis's 1998 autobiography *Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement*, co-written with Mike D'Orso, won the Robert F. Kennedy Book Award,^[120] the Anisfield-Wolf Book Award,^[121] the Christopher Award and the Lillian Smith Book Award.^[122] It appeared on numerous bestseller lists, was selected as a New York Times Notable Book of the Year,^[123] was named by the American Library Association as its Nonfiction Book of the Year,^[124] and was included among *Newsweek* magazine's 2009 list of "50 Books For Our Times."^[125] It was critically acclaimed, with *The Washington Post* calling it "the definitive account of the civil rights movement"^[126] and the *Los Angeles Times* proclaiming it "destined to become a classic in civil rights literature."^[127]


His life is also the subject of a 2002 book for young people, *John Lewis: From Freedom Rider to Congressman*. In 2012, Lewis released *Across That Bridge*, written with Brenda Jones, to mixed reviews. *Publishers Weekly*'s review said, "At its best, the book provides a testament to the power of nonviolence in social movements... At its worst, it resembles an extended campaign speech."^{[128][129]}


March




President Barack Obama hugs Lewis during a commemoration of the 50th anniversary of Bloody Sunday and the Selma to Montgomery voting rights marches, March 7, 2015.

External video

 *Booknotes* interview with Lewis on *Walking With the Wind*, July 12, 1998 (<https://www.c-span.org/video/?107917-1/walking-wind>), C-SPAN


 Q&A interview with Lewis on *Across That Bridge*, August 5, 2012 (<https://www.c-span.org/video/?306997-1/qa-representative-john-lewis-d-ga>), C-SPAN


 *In Depth* interview with Lewis, October 6, 2013 (<https://www.c-span.org/video/?314851-1/depth-representative-john-lewis>), C-SPAN



Lewis signing copies of *March Book One* (2013), the first volume of his graphic novel autobiography, at Midtown Comics in Manhattan

External video

 Presentation by Lewis and Andrew Aydin on *March: Book Two*, November 21, 2015 (<https://www.c-span.org/video/?400036-3/march>), C-SPAN

 Interview with Lewis and Aydin on *March: Book Three*, September 24, 2016 (<https://www.c-span.org/video/?415635-6/open-phones-representative-john-lewis-andrew-aydin>), C-SPAN

In 2013, Lewis became the first member of Congress to write a graphic novel, with the launch of a trilogy titled *March*. The *March* trilogy is a black and white comics trilogy about the Civil Rights Movement, told through the perspective of civil rights leader and U.S. Congressman John Lewis. The first volume, *March: Book One* is written by Lewis and Andrew Aydin, illustrated and lettered by Nate Powell and was published in August 2013,^[130] the second volume, *March: Book Two* was published in January 2015 and the final volume, *March: Book Three* was published in August 2016.^[131]

In an August 2014 interview, Lewis cited the influence of a 1958 comic book, *Martin Luther King and the Montgomery Story*, on his decision to adapt his experience to the graphic novel format.^[132] *March: Book One* became a number one New York Times bestseller for graphic novels^[133] and spent more than a year on the lists.

March: Book One received an "Author Honor" from the American Library Association's 2014 Coretta Scott King Book Awards.^[134] *Book One* also became the first graphic novel to win a Robert F. Kennedy Book Award, receiving a "Special Recognition" bust in 2014.^[135]

March: Book One was selected by first-year reading programs in 2014 at Michigan State University,^[136] Georgia State University,^[137] and Marquette University.^[138]

March: Book Two was released in 2015 and immediately became both a New York Times and Washington Post bestseller for graphic novels.

The release of *March: Book Three* in August 2016 brought all three volumes into the top 3 slots of the New York Times bestseller list for graphic novels for 6 consecutive weeks.^[139] The third volume was announced as the recipient of the 2017 Printz Award, the Coretta Scott King Award, the YALSA Award for Excellence in Nonfiction, the 2016 National Book Award in Young People's Literature,^[140] and the Sibert Medal at the American Library Association's annual Midwinter Meeting in January 2017.^[141]

The *March* trilogy received the Carter G. Woodson Book Award in the Secondary (grades 7–12) category in 2017.^[142]

Run

In 2018, Lewis and Andrew Aydin co-wrote another graphic novel as sequel to the *March* series entitled *Run*. The graphic novel picks up the events in Lewis' life after the passage of the Civil Rights Act. The authors teamed with award-winning comic book illustrator Afua Richardson for the book, which was originally scheduled to be released in August 2018 (but has since been rescheduled).^[143] Nate Powell, who illustrated *March*, will also contribute to the art.^[144]

Personal life

Lewis met Lillian Miles at a New Year's Eve party hosted by Xernona Clayton. They married in 1968. Together, they had one son, named John-Miles. Lillian died on December 31, 2012.^[145]

Lewis was a member of Phi Beta Sigma fraternity.^[146]

On December 29, 2019, Lewis announced that he had been diagnosed with stage IV pancreatic cancer.^{[147][148]} He remained in the Washington D.C. area for his treatment. Lewis stated: "I have been in some kind of fight – for freedom, equality, basic human rights – for nearly my entire life. I have never faced a fight quite like the one I have now."^{[149][150]}

Death

On July 17, 2020, Lewis died at the age of 80 after a six-month battle with pancreatic cancer in Atlanta, Georgia.^{[151][152][153]} Lewis died on the same day as his friend and fellow activist, C.T. Vivian.^[154]

President Donald Trump said that he was saddened to hear about the death of Lewis and ordered all flags to be flown at half-staff.^[155] Former President Barack Obama said in a statement that Lewis had an "enormous impact" in U.S. history. Former Presidents George W. Bush and Bill Clinton also admired Lewis, as did several members of Congress, and other political leaders.^[156] Senators Marco Rubio and Dan Sullivan accidentally posted a picture of the late Maryland Congressman Elijah Cummings, who died in October 2019, when posting their tributes to Lewis. Both soon deleted their posts.^[157] Calls to rename the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama after Lewis soon grew after his death.^{[158][159]}

Honors



Presidential Medal of Freedom awarded by President Barack Obama in 2011

Lewis was honored by having the 1997 sculpture by Thornton Dial, *The Bridge*, placed at Ponce de Leon Avenue and Freedom Park, Atlanta, dedicated to him by the artist. In 1999, Lewis was awarded the Wallenberg Medal from the University of Michigan in recognition of his courageous lifelong commitment to the defense of civil and human rights. In that same year he received the Four Freedoms Award for the Freedom of Speech.^[160]

In 2001, the John F. Kennedy Library Foundation awarded Lewis the Profile in Courage Award "for his extraordinary courage, leadership and commitment to civil rights."^[161] It is a lifetime achievement award and has been given out only twice, John Lewis and William Winter (in 2008). The next year he was awarded the Spingarn Medal

from the NAACP.^[162]

In 2004, Lewis received the Golden Plate Award of the American Academy of Achievement.^[163]

In 2006, he received the U. Senator John Heinz Award for Greatest Public Service by an Elected or Appointed Official, an award given out annually by Jefferson Awards.^[164] In September 2007, Lewis was awarded the Dole Leadership Prize from the Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics at the University of Kansas.^[165]

Lewis was the only living speaker from the March on Washington present on the stage during the inauguration of Barack Obama. Obama signed a commemorative photograph for Lewis with the words, "Because of you, John. Barack Obama."^[166]

In 2010, Lewis was awarded the First LBJ Liberty and Justice for All Award, given to him by the Lyndon Baines Johnson Foundation,^[167] and the next year, Lewis was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by President Barack Obama.^[168]

In 2016, it was announced that a future United States Navy underway replenishment oiler would be named USNS John Lewis.^[169] Also in 2016, Lewis was awarded the Liberty Medal at the National Constitution Center. The prestigious award has been awarded to international leaders from Malala Yousafzai to the 14th Dalai Lama, presidents George Bush and Bill Clinton and other dignitaries and visionaries. The timing of Lewis's award coincided with the 150th anniversary of the 14th amendment.^{[170][171]} In 2020, Lewis was awarded the Walter P. Reuther Humanitarian Award by Wayne State University, the UAW, and the Reuther family.^[172]

Lewis gave numerous commencement addresses, including at the School of Visual Arts (SVA) in 2014,^[173] Bates College (in Lewiston, Maine) in 2016^[174], Bard College and Bank Street College of Education in 2017, and Harvard University in 2018.^[175]

Lewis' death in July 2020 has given rise to support for renaming the historically significant Pettus bridge in Lewis' honor, an idea previously floated years ago.^{[176][177]}

Honorary academic degrees

Lewis was awarded more than 50 honorary degrees,^[178] including:

- 1995: Honorary Doctor of Public Service degree from Northeastern University^[179]
- 1998: Honorary Humane Letters degree from Brandeis University^[180]
- 1999: Honorary Doctor of Laws degree from the University of Massachusetts Boston^[181]
- 2001: Honorary Doctor of Laws degree from University at Albany^[182]
- 2002: Honorary D.H.L. from Howard University^[183]
- 2004: Honorary degree from Portland State University^[184]
- 2004: Honorary LHD from Juniata College^[185]
- 2007: Honorary LL.D. degree from the University of Vermont^[186]
- 2007: Honorary LL.D. degree from Adelphi University^[187]
- 2012: Honorary LL.D. degrees from Brown University,^[188] University of Pennsylvania,^[189] Harvard University,^[175] and the University of Connecticut School of Law^[190]
- 2013: Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters^[191] from Judson College.
- 2013: Honorary LL.D. degrees from Cleveland State University^[192] and Union College^[193]
- 2014: Honorary LL.D. degree from Emory University^[194]
- 2014: Honorary Doctorate of Fine Arts from the School of Visual Arts.^[195]
- 2014: Honorary Bachelor of Arts from Lawrence University.^[196]



John Lewis addressing audience in the Great Hall of the Library of Congress on the 50th Anniversary of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, August 28, 2013



Lewis receives an honorary degree from Brown University in 2012

- 2014: Honorary Doctor of Letters degree from Marquette University^[197]
- 2015: Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters from the McCourt School of Public Policy, Georgetown University.^[198]
- 2015: Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters from Lawrence University^[199]
- 2015: Honorary degree from Goucher College^[200]
- 2015: Honorary Doctor of Laws degree from Hampton University^[201]
- 2016: Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters from New York University.^[202]
- 2016: Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters from Bates College^[174]
- 2016: Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters from Washington University in St. Louis^[203]
- 2016: Honorary Doctor of Policy Analysis from the Frederick S. Pardee RAND Graduate School^[204]
- 2016: Honorary Doctor of Laws degree from Washington and Jefferson College^[205]
- 2017: Honorary Doctor of Laws degree from Yale University^[206]
- 2017: Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree from Bank Street Graduate School of Education^[207]
- 2018: Honorary Doctor of Law degree from Boston University^[208]
- 2019: Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree from City College of New York^[209]
- 2019: Honorary Doctorate from Tulane University^[210]

Electoral history

Georgia's 5th congressional district: Results 1986–2018^{[211][212][213][214][215]}

Year	Democratic	Votes	%	Republican	Votes	%	
<u>1986</u>	John Lewis	93,229	75%	Portia Scott	30,562	25%	[216]
<u>1988</u>	John Lewis	135,194	78%	J. W. Tibbs	37,693	22%	[217]
<u>1990</u>	John Lewis	86,037	76%	J. W. Tibbs	27,781	24%	[218]
<u>1992</u>	John Lewis	147,445	72%	Paul Stabler	56,960	28%	[219]
<u>1994</u>	John Lewis	85,094	69%	Dale Dixon	37,999	31%	[220]
<u>1996</u>	John Lewis	136,555	100%	<i>No candidate</i>			[221]
<u>1998</u>	John Lewis	109,177	79%	John H. Lewis	29,877	21%	[222]
<u>2000</u>	John Lewis	137,333	77%	Hank Schwab	40,606	23%	[223]
<u>2002</u>	John Lewis	116,259	100%	<i>No candidate</i>			[224]
<u>2004</u>	John Lewis	201,773	100%	<i>No candidate</i>			[56]
<u>2006</u>	John Lewis	122,380	100%	<i>No candidate</i>			[57]
<u>2008</u>	John Lewis	231,368	100%	<i>No candidate</i>			[58]
<u>2010</u>	John Lewis	130,782	74%	Fenn Little	46,622	26%	[225]
<u>2012</u>	John Lewis	234,330	84%	Howard Stopeck	43,335	16%	[225]
<u>2014</u>	John Lewis	170,326	100%	<i>No candidate</i>			[59]
<u>2016</u>	John Lewis	253,781	84%	Douglas Bell	46,768	16%	[226]
<u>2018</u>	John Lewis	273,084	100%	<i>No candidate</i>			[60]

In popular culture

Lewis was portrayed by Stephan James in the 2014 film *Selma*. He made a cameo appearance in the music video for Young Jeezy's song "My President", which was released in the month of Obama's inauguration.^{[227][228]} In 2017, John Lewis voiced his guest character (also called "John Lewis") in the *Arthur* episode "Arthur Takes a Stand".^[229] Lewis's life was chronicled in the 2017 PBS documentary *John Lewis: Get In the Way*.^[230]

Lewis appeared in the 2019 documentary *Bobby Kennedy for President*, in which Lewis commends Robert F. Kennedy especially in regards to his support for civil rights throughout his time as a senator for New York and during Kennedy's 1968 presidential campaign.^[231] Lewis also recounted his deep sorrow following the 1968 assassinations of Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr.^[232]

Lewis often attended Comic Con in San Diego, California, in support of his graphic novels and in 2014 led an impromptu simulated Selma civil rights march arm in arm with children dressed as his 24 year old self.^{[233][234]}

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See also

- [List of African-American United States Representatives](#)
- [List of civil rights leaders](#)
- [List of United States Congress members who died in office](#)

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Further reading

- Oral History Interview with John Lewis (<http://docsouth.unc.edu/sohp/A-0073/menu.html>) from Oral Histories of the American South (<http://docsouth.unc.edu/sohp>), November 20, 1973
- *Booknotes* interview with Lewis on *Walking With the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement* (<https://web.archive.org/web/20121001171000/http://www.booknotes.org/Watch/107917-1/John+Lewis.aspx>), July 12, 1998
- "SNCC – People: John Lewis." (<http://www.ibiblio.org/sncc/lewis.html>), April 11, 2011
- "Congressman John R. Lewis Biography and Interview." (<https://www.achievement.org/achiever/congressman-john-r-lewis/#interview>) www.achievement.org. [American Academy of Achievement](#).

External links

- John Lewis (https://curlie.org/Regional/North_America/United_States/Georgia/Government/Federal/US_House_of_Representatives/John_Lewis_%5BD-5%5D) at Curlie
- SNCC Digital Gateway: John Lewis (<https://snccdigital.org/people/john-lewis/>), Documentary website created by the SNCC Legacy Project and Duke University, telling the story of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and grassroots organizing from the inside-out
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- Biography (<http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=I000287>) at the *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*
- Profile (<https://www.votesmart.org/candidate/26820>) at *Vote Smart*
- Financial information (federal office) (<https://www.fec.gov/data/candidate/H6GA05217>) at the *Federal Election Commission*
- Legislation sponsored (<https://www.congress.gov/member/john-lewis/688>) at the *Library of Congress*
- John Lewis debates the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) (<http://www.c-spanvideo.org/clip/4397709>), June 11, 1996.
- Rep. Lewis on Congress, Gitmo, Afghan War and Charles Rangel (http://www.democracynow.org/2010/11/17/rep_john_lewis_on_congress_after) – video interview by *Democracy Now!*, November 17, 2010
- Appearances (<https://www.c-span.org/person/?johnlewis>) on C-SPAN
- Finding your Roots with Henry Louis Gates, Jr. "Season 1, Episode 2: John Lewis and Cory Booker" (<https://www.pbs.org/weta/finding-your-roots/about/meet-our-guests/john-lewis>)

Non-profit organization positions		
Preceded by <u>Charles McDew</u>	Chair of the <u>Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee</u> 1963–1966	Succeeded by <u>Stokely Carmichael</u>
U.S. House of Representatives		
Preceded by <u>Wyche Fowler</u>	Member of the U.S. House of Representatives from <u>Georgia's 5th congressional district</u> 1987–2020	Succeeded by <u>Vacant</u>
Party political offices		
Preceded by <u>David Bonior</u>	<u>House Democratic Senior Chief Deputy Whip</u> 1991–2019	Succeeded by <u>Cedric Richmond</u> <i>as House Democratic Assistant Majority Whip</i>

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