



ALABAMA AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY

BEYOND

THE BOOK

THE ALABAMA BICENTENNIAL COMMISSION
AFRICAN AMERICAN HERITAGE COMMITTEE



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In 2019, The Alabama Bicentennial Commission African American Heritage Committee published ***The Future Emerges from the Past: Celebrating 200 Years of Alabama African American History and Culture***. This book highlights the history, people, events, institutions, and movements that contributed to the Great State of Alabama, the nation, and world during the state's first 200 years.

The **Alabama African American History Beyond the Book** website continues the journey and goes beyond what could be included in the book's 244 pages. On a monthly basis this site will not only highlight past Alabama African American history makers and events, it will also contain present day icons, unsung heroes/heroines, and current events. Short articles along with links to videos, photos, reference material, and additional information will be uploaded monthly for all to enjoy.

The website's goal is the same as the book's: to inspire the young and young at heart to dream big and never allow obstacles to stop their march toward achieving those dreams.



*Congressman, statesman
and civil rights leader* **John Lewis**



Lewis at the site that had come to symbolize his long career fighting injustice, the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama. Jeremy Moorhead/CNN

John Robert Lewis was born February 21, 1940, in Pike County, Alabama, to sharecropper parents, one of 10 children.

After attending local county schools, He hoped to attend Troy State College (now Troy University) in Troy, Alabama. Due to the pressures of segregation and costs, Lewis instead attended American Baptist College in Nashville, Tennessee, where students could work in exchange for their tuition.

After contemplating transferring to Troy State College, he wrote to Martin Luther King Jr. about his plan to challenge the school's segregation policy. Fortunately for all of us, after his meetings with Dr. King and other civil rights leaders he decided to forego his plan to desegregate Troy State College.



Instead, he turned his focus to the Civil Rights Movement and started to organize sit-ins at segregated lunch counters and participate in the Freedom Rides. Lewis served as the chairman for Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the student organization of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). As the youngest speaker at the 1963 “March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom,” Lewis challenged those in attendance to continue the work of equality in spite of those who said to “be patient and wait.”



Clockwise from top left: College student John Lewis being removed by police from a segregated restaurant in Nashville, Tenn. after leading a sit-in, c. 1960s. (*The Tennessean*)

Lewis and fellow Freedom Rider James Zwerg, after they were attacked by segregationists in Montgomery, Ala., May 1961. (Bettmann/Corbis)

John Lewis’ booking photo after his arrest in Jackson, Miss., 1961, (FBI) After Montgomery, the Freedom Riders continued under federal protection to Jackson, where they were immediately arrested and jailed for breach of peace.

Lewis (light-colored trench coat) and other marchers are confronted by a police blockade during the infamous “Bloody Sunday” march in Selma, Ala., March 7, 1965. (Spider Martin)

“Never be afraid to make some noise and get in good trouble, necessary trouble.”

—John Lewis



As a leader in the Civil Rights Movement, Lewis was brutally beaten while participating in the Freedom Rides in Montgomery, Alabama, and when attempting to cross the Edmund Pettus Bridge in the Selma to Montgomery voting rights march (Bloody Sunday). Fifty-five years later, on March 1, 2020, Lewis returned to the Edmund Pettus Bridge and encouraged everyone to “Get in good trouble, necessary trouble, and redeem the soul of America.”



In 2018, John Lewis, sits for a photo shoot at the U.S. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (Carol M. Highsmith) At right: Selma one more time. Lewis visits Brown Chapel A.M.E. Church in Selma, Alabama, March 8, 2020. (Public Domain)

In 1986, Lewis was elected to represent Georgia’s Fifth Congressional District, becoming only the second African American to represent Georgia in Congress since Reconstruction. His dynamic leadership for justice for all, nonviolence, and civil and human rights earned him the reputation of being the “conscience of Congress.”

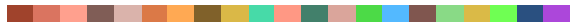


During his lifetime Lewis was honored with the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the NAACP Spingarn Medal, the National Education Association Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial, and the John F. Kennedy “Profile in Courage Award” for Lifetime Achievement. He was also named to the state of Alabama’s Academy of Honor.



Top: Visitors passing by look at a picture of John Lewis as his body lay in state at the U.S. Capitol, July 2020, Washington, D.C. (Tracy Meehleib)

Left: Congressman John Lewis leaves the U.S. Capitol for the last time, July 2020. (Public Domain)



Representative John Robert Lewis served as a member of Congress for 33 years until his death from pancreatic cancer on July 17, 2020.



Above: Congressman John Robert Lewis' "final crossing" of the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Ala., 26 July 2020. (AP)



Would you like to know more about John Lewis?

- Representative John Lewis' final words in the *New York Times*. 'Democracy Is Not a State. It Is an Act.'
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/30/opinion/john-lewis-op-ed.html>
- President Barack Obama's Eulogy for John Lewis - July 30, 2020
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/30/us/obama-eulogy-john-lewis-full-transcript.html>
- Alabama Department of Archives and History: Photos of John Lewis from Bloody Sunday, March 7, 1965.
<http://digital.archives.alabama.gov/cdm/ref/collection/amg/id/40981>
<http://digital.archives.alabama.gov/cdm/ref/collection/amg/id/40754>
- Listen to this *Story Corps* interview from National Public Radio with John Lewis and Valerie Jackson:
<https://storycorps.org/stories/the-boy-from-troy-how-dr-king-inspired-a-young-john-lewis/>
- Watch this 1-minute *Legacy Moment* from Alabama Public Television about the Selma to Montgomery March:
<https://www.alabamalegacy.org/selma-montgomery-march/>
- Read John Lewis' speech for the "March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom," 1963. (There are two versions of the speech that you can read and compare.)
<https://billmoyers.com/content/two-versions-of-john-lewis-speech/#original>
- Check out this article from the *Encyclopedia of Alabama*: <http://encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/h-1841>