

John R. Lewis



As we continue to honor Black History Month, one individual worth acknowledging is politician and civil rights activist John Lewis. Born on February 21st, 1940, Lewis lived a relatively happy childhood in Troy, Alabama. In 1955, after hearing the news of the Montgomery bus boycott and the words spoken by Martin Luther King, he was inspired to act for the changes he wanted to see. After leaving Alabama to attend the American Baptist Theological Seminar, Lewis learned about non-violent protest and helped organize sit-ins, which he would later be arrested for. In 1963, Lewis became chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. Where he soon would be known as one of the “Big Six” leaders of the civil rights movement, that eventually helped plan the March on Washington.

A year after the March on Washington, the Civil Rights Act became law. Despite this, it was still challenging for African Americans to vote in the South. With the help of Hosea Williams, they led a march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, on March 7th, 1965. After crossing the Edmund Pettus Bridge, the marchers were attacked by state troopers. Lewis sustained many injuries including a fractured skull. This would later be referred to as “Bloody Sunday”, and this event sped up the creation of the 1965 Voting Rights Act. After leaving the SNCC in 1966, he became the director of the Voter Education Project, where he helped register millions of minority voters.

In 1986, Lewis was elected to the House of Representatives, representing Georgia's 5th District. During his time in office, he called for renewals of the Voting Rights Act, health care reform, gun control, improvements in education, and measures to fight poverty. On July 17th, 2020, John Lewis passed away at the age of 80 after battling stage 4 pancreatic cancer. Although gone John Lewis will go down as one of the most influential people in history. His legacy will be honored for generations to come and his heroic efforts to fight for equality will never be forgotten.