



PHOTO BY JONATHAN ERNST/REUTERS

John Lewis crosses the historic Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Ala., with Presidents Barack Obama and George W. Bush to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Bloody Sunday on March 7, 2015.

# John Lewis: From Selma to Congress

*Vendors at Washington, D.C., street paper Street Sense sat down with the congressman to talk civil rights, then and now*

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From Selma, Ala. to the halls of Congress, both Democrats and Republicans alike agree that U.S. Representative John Lewis of Georgia has been a monumental figure in American politics.

Since his youth, Lewis has made fighting for the equality of all Americans his mission. While a student at Fisk University in Nashville, Tenn., he organized many sit-ins to desegregate lunch counters. It was during this time that he was introduced to the principle and practice of non-violent protest.

After roles in both the Carter administration and the Atlanta City Council, Lewis was elected to Congress in 1987, where he has been re-elected ever since. Often called the “conscience of

Congress,” he has brought before his colleagues ideas and legislation that seek to promote freedom, justice and equality for all.

As prominent of a figure as he is, Lewis has a sense of humility. Indeed, walking into the congressman’s office and shaking his hand is like having the pages of a history book transformed into reality. But Lewis is ever-focused on the now, and how our actions today will shape the future of not only the United States, but the entire world.

On Jan. 5, with a warm greeting, and only after making sure we’d all been offered something to drink, Lewis invited the Street Sense crew, including vendors Angie Whitehurst and Ken Martin, to ask him some questions.

Street Sense is Street Roots’ sister street paper in Washington, D.C.

**Angie Whitehurst:** *We have all of these groups and organizations who advocate an end to hunger and poverty and for more affordable housing – some have been around for decades. What is it that we are not doing, that we need to do, to make it really happen?*

**John Lewis:** Well, you need to continue to expand what you’re doing, to become more inclusive, pulling and working together. You’re so right, there’s so many different groups. But many of the groups have very little cooperation, and people going in different directions.

**AW:** *So you’re talking about building a coalition?*

**JL:** Yes. During the civil rights movement we had a coalition. We used to call it a coalition of conscience. We came together so it didn’t matter if it was the National