

# True American Hero

Congressman John Lewis to speak in Eugene.

In late October, Georgia lawmakers honored U.S. Rep. John Lewis (D-GA) by introducing a bill in Congress to name an Atlanta civil rights educational center after him. Sens. Zell Miller and Saxby Chambliss and Reps. David Scott and Denise Majette proposed bills to designate a building purchased by the Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic Site as the John Lewis Civil Rights Institute.

A fitting tribute to a true American hero. At 23, Lewis was the youngest of the keynote speakers at the 1963 March on Washington. It was a year when people were beaten, jailed and even killed while participating in nonviolent protest. African Americans simply wanted the right to vote. In Birmingham, the commissioner of police — Eugene “Bull” Connor — used attack dogs and fire hoses on peaceful protesters. Mississippi NAACP leader Medgar Evers was assassinated.

Lewis himself was beaten by police on Bloody Sunday, yet went on to chair the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. Learning from MLK, he has tirelessly worked toward The Dream for the past 40 years, preaching peace and nonviolence as the only means toward the just end of civil rights for all.

Today, Congressman Lewis, now in his ninth term as representative from Atlanta, is the last remaining survivor of the 10 civil rights, religious, and labor leaders that led and spoke at the March on Washington.

Congressman Peter DeFazio arrived in the House at the same time as Lewis 17 years ago. Together, he says they’ve fought for progressive causes. “At a time when Congress is full of midgets, Lewis is a true giant for his role in history,” says DeFazio, adding, “For example, he’s as passionately opposed as I am to NAFTA, WTO and all those trade agreements.”

DeFazio remembers one late night several years back when the Republicans were working out a trade agreement with China, being the “most abusive they’d been, until

now,” he says, with special offices set up within the Capitol for high-powered lobbyists, with access “to strongarm people” and public resources available to them.

“John and I decided to visit those people, and went down and burst through their office door. John was in front — he’s a stocky guy — and he shouted ‘We’ve come to throw the money lenders out of the temple!’”

Pandemonium ensued. The lobbyists even dropped their cell phones.

“The next day, the room was empty,” says DeFazio. “It had been a clear violation of federal law, anyway.”

The respect DeFazio has for Lewis is apparent in his help in bringing him to Eugene. Sponsored by the UO Office of the President, Lewis will speak at 5:30 pm on Monday, Nov. 10 in the EMU Ballroom, UO, delivering the lecture, “Peace, Social Change and Justice.”

His lecture will touch on the changes that have occurred during the past 40 years, the positive inroads made to “fulfill the promise of the dream,” he says, adding, “it’s time to build on that.”

Lewis looks to the current climate in the U.S., specifically, the USA PATRIOT Act (UPA), as having a most adverse impact.

“It’s a violation in my estimation of basic civil liberties — that’s why I voted against it and why I think we should strike it,” he says.

Lewis also has strong words for universities that have adopted UPA legislation on campuses. This past summer, the UO rewrote the Oregon Administrative Rules to conform with UPA legislation, which would allow the university to divulge students’ information — without their permission and without notification — to a government agency that asked for it, and would also force libraries to hand over students’ Internet and other library research information if asked.

“I think that’s a violation of basic decency,” says Lewis. “Of simple constitutional rights. It shouldn’t happen. In the name of

protecting the country, we’re violating human beings. We’re slowly but surely reverting back to another period.”

To fight that backward slide, Lewis wants to see more young people step up and take action. “Many people today think the civil rights techniques and tactics of the late ‘50s and ‘60s are old hat and obsolete. But they’re still relevant,” he says. “We need to regain passion. We have a need for nonviolent direct action. I speak about the right to protest what is right. You have an obligation to do what I call ‘Get in the way.’ Move your feet. When I was growing up in Alabama in the ‘40s and ‘50s, my parents said, ‘Don’t get in trouble; don’t get in the way, but in the ‘60s I got in trouble — good trouble. I got in the way.”

“Today as citizens, we’re too quiet, too patient. We have to find a way, to make a way, to dramatize the issue. It’s still so relevant. I tell young people today ... During the ‘60s we didn’t have a website, we didn’t have a fax, we had no cell phone. We had our bodies and literally put them on the line. We must do that today to turn this country around — to take it back.”

But Lewis has always preached nonviolence.

“I happen to believe in nonviolence not



simply as a technique, a tactic, but a way toward what I call ‘the beloved community.’ To gain peace, we must use it as a way of life. The way must be one of love, of peace, of nonviolence. You come to the point where the means and the ends are inseparable and somehow the way is caught up in the end, and the way is caught up in the means. You have to believe in the idea that hate is too heavy a burden to bear. There is a better, more excellent way.”

As to those protesters who have laid their bodies down for the good fight, but have been attacked by police with pepper spray and rubber bullets, Lewis says, “I would say to those protesters, ‘Hang in there. Don’t give up. Don’t give in. Don’t become bitter. Don’t get lost in despair. Keep coming. In doing so you will educate the police and the larger community. You have to keep doing it.’ We kept sitting in and going on freedom rides. We didn’t stop and we won. We prevailed.”

EW

### Acting for Affirmative Action

Earlier this year, Congressman John Lewis (D-GA) applauded the U.S. Supreme Court decision in upholding the University of Michigan’s Law School affirmative action program. To encourage other universities to keep such programs alive, Lewis says, “Affirmative action is still needed. We need to affirm the inclusion and the participation of all young people in higher education. For so long people have been left out because of gender, color, race ... There should be a real move to make the university look like America when it comes to faculty and the student body.

America	University of Oregon	
	Students	Faculty
Male	48.9%	46%
Female	51.1%	55%
White	68.2%	54%
Hispanic	13.5%	73%
African American	11.8%	3%
Asian	4%	3%
Native American	0.7%	1%
Other	7%	6%
		Int'l 7%

America Source: U.S. Census American Community Survey Change Profile 2002. University of Oregon Source: UO Resource Management. 2002 UO Profile. UO declined to respond: 7% students, 5% faculty

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