

Selma Civil Rights March Still Vivid for Rep. Lewis

Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Forty-nine years after John Lewis and fellow marchers tried to cross the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, the memories of “Bloody Sunday” are still vivid in his mind. It was one of the defining moments of the civil rights era. “We were beaten, tear gassed, trampled and chased by men on horseback,” said Lewis, a civil rights activist and longtime Democratic congressman from Georgia. “Many of us accepted the way of non-violence as a way of life, as a way of living. We were willing to be arrested, to be jailed. We accepted the beatings. And we never gave up.”

In a recent interview with The Associated Press, Lewis — who is portrayed by the actor Stephan James in the historical drama

to Montgomery, led by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

“It is very powerful. It is very moving. It is real. It is so real,” Lewis said. “It says something about the distance we’ve come in laying down the burden of race.”

The son of sharecroppers, Lewis grew up on a family farm outside Troy, Alabama, and attended segregated public schools. During the civil rights movement, he organized sit-in demonstrations at segregated lunch counters in Nashville, Tennessee.

In 1963, he addressed the historic March on Washington — two years before he and hundreds of others marched on “Bloody Sunday.”

On March 7, 1965, Lewis and others were beaten by state troopers as they began to march to Montgomery.

The march is credited with helping build



In this Dec. 22, 2014 image taken from video, U.S. Rep. John Lewis, D-Ga., discusses the historical drama “Selma” and civil rights in the United States during an interview in Atlanta. Forty-nine years after Lewis and other marchers tried to cross the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Ala., memories of “Bloody Sunday” are still vivid in his mind. It was one of the defining moments of the civil rights era.

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“Selma” — said the timing of the film’s release was fitting and appropriate after protests of grand jury decisions not to indict white police officers in the deaths of black men in Ferguson, Missouri; and New York.

“Selma,” the film co-written and directed by Ava DuVernay, is based on the 1965 marches from the Alabama cities of Selma

momentum for passage that year of the landmark Voting Rights Act, which opened polling places to millions of blacks and ended all-white governments in the South.

“We broke down those signs that said, ‘White Waiting,’ ‘Colored Waiting,’ ‘White Men,’ ‘Colored Men,’ ‘White Women,’ ‘Colored Women.’ We got a Voting Rights

Act passed 50 years ago, a Civil Rights Act passed. But, we still have a distance to go,” said Lewis.

“In many communities today, the question of race is still very real. You can feel it. You can almost taste it. But, you cannot deny the fact that America is a different America. Even in the heart of the Deep South, those

signs are gone. And, they will not return. People registered. And, they are voting.”

Lewis was first elected to Congress in 1986. He was re-elected to a 15th term in November.



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