



There are not enough words to convey all that John Lewis meant to this country and the world. If you have not read his three graphic novels, *March* (Parts 1-3) and see the recent documentary *John Lewis: Good Trouble*, they are essential as a starting point.

There are two moments of his life I got to observe in person:

November 15, 2014, early on in my time at Ohio State, I heard him speak in the Archie Griffin ballroom with his staffer Andrew Aydin and the artist Nate Powell, who had worked with him on the first volume of the graphic novel about his life, *March*. There were easily 400 or 500 people in the room. He talked about growing up preaching to his chickens, meeting Martin Luther King, who called him “the boy from Troy,” and being beaten in Selma marching for voting rights, when he “saw death.”

At the end, he announced he was staying to sign autographs, and at least 75% of the audience got up, and got in line. For those of you who went to OSU, the line snaked all the way around the ballroom. I got in line. No one dropped out of line. When my turn came, I thanked him for making the country a better place to live, he signed my book, we took a picture, but he stayed for what seemed like two hours to meet people. Perhaps it was because there was nothing else on his schedule. But that wasn't my sense.

March 14, 2018, it was a cold and windy day. I joined students including Democracy Summer alums walking out from Blair and marching for gun violence prevention legislation to the Capitol, along with Mr. Samir Paul. The program stretched on as we sat on the Hill, looking up at the stage and the Capitol dome behind it. Hours in, people started getting restless. Some were shivering. It

clouded up a bit, and the sun wasn't quite as warm as it had been. Some started to get up to leave. An alarmed cry went up from the crowd, "Don't leave—John Lewis is coming! Wait for John Lewis!" And for the most part, again, few left. He got onstage in an aviator hat, the kind with the three flaps. He looked out at us, and we must have made good stand ins for his chickens way back in Troy, because Rep. Lewis began to preach. He joked about when he had a little more hair, emphasizing the need for his cap. He urged us to get in good trouble, necessary trouble. He implored us not to give up.

When we named the rooms of the Raskin campaign office ahead of Democracy Summer 2018 after progressive figures from the country's history, we debated a variety of names. But there was no question John Lewis had to be among them. There is a concept that one really lives as long as the last person who remembers them. If we accept that, then John Lewis is truly immortal.

The irony is not lost on me that a man who had fought so hard, been beaten, bloodied, and left unconscious to get more people in line to vote himself caused lines and crowds to wait without attrition—just for a chance to meet him for a moment. In many ways, our country, in its long train of injustice and abuses, had and has always been waiting for John Lewis to call out what is unjust and do what is just.

But in thinking back to both times I ever saw him in person, I can't help but focus on the fact that waiting was in both instances a two way street. He was a member of Congress and an icon. He could have spent his time anywhere, he could have left early, but he didn't.

Who was he waiting for?

It was us.

He lives on in the actions we take and the righteous fights we dig into. What actions will we take? How will we honor him and his work? There are 108 days.

He often said, "The vote is the most powerful nonviolent tool we have in a democratic society." Let's go. We owe him a debt we can never repay. But we can at least begin to prove that the future he told us to fight for will be something worth the wait.

Rest in Power

Rep. John Lewis, 1940-2020

Paul Ellis  
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Silver Spring, MD

