

**Who was John Lewis
and what was his
role in the Black
freedom movement?**



Early life

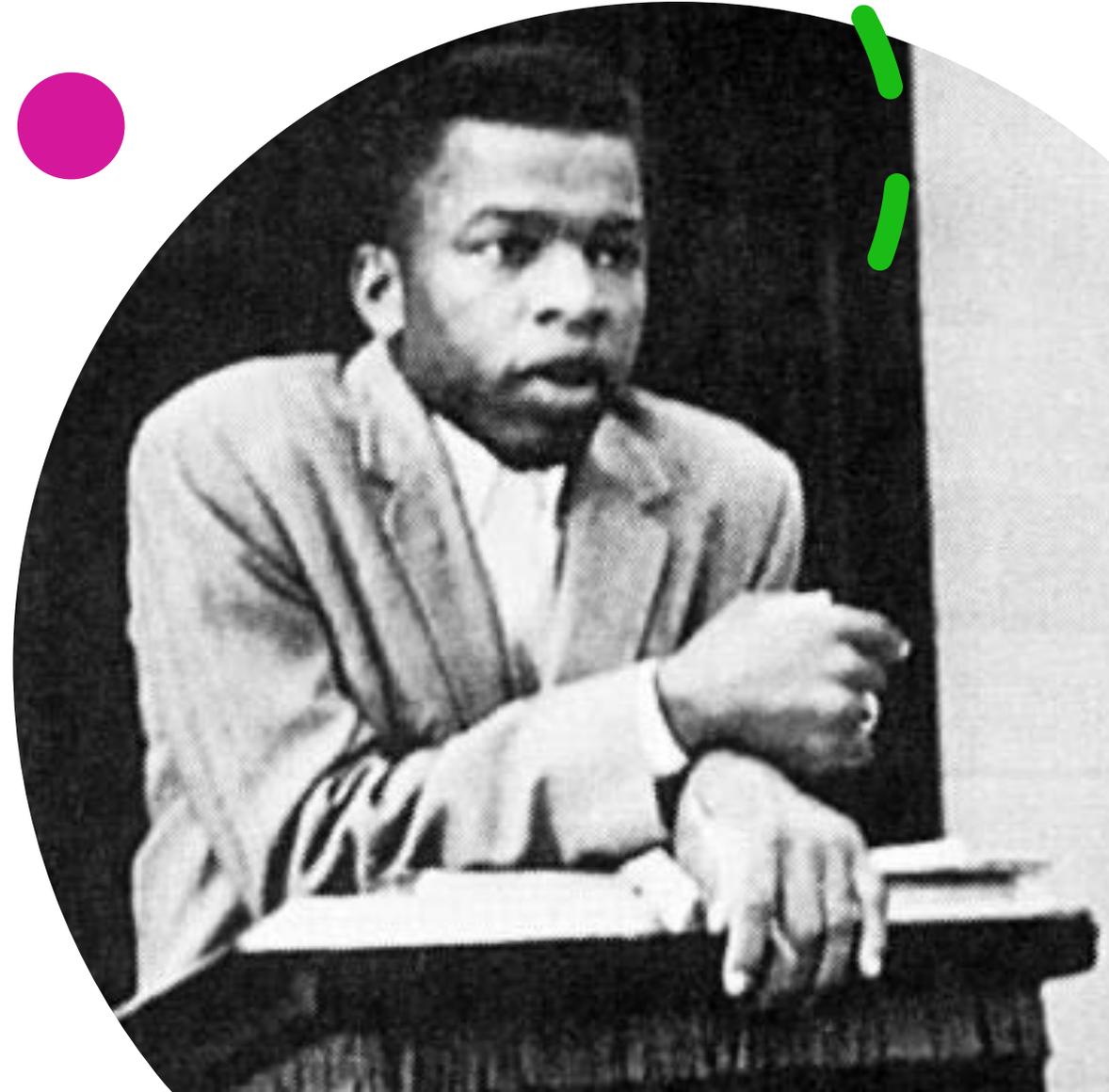
- John Lewis was born in Alabama on February 21, 1940. He was one of the children of sharecropper parents, so he was expected to help on the farm.
- He aspired to be a preacher at a young age.

Young adulthood

- John's inspirations were Rosa Parks and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and Billy Graham. These influential people motivated John to pursue his activism.
- At age 15, John began preaching in local black churches.
- After high school, John wanted to go to Morehouse college but ended up going to American Baptist Theological Seminary (ABT).
- John was his own breadwinner while in college.

Introduction to activism

- John's activism journey kicked off in his first year of college. He tried to form a NAACP group on campus, but his school did not approve because Black institutions depended on White funding.





Effort to desegregate

- John was determined to desegregate Troy State University, Alabama. This was an all-white institution, so he decided to apply, but never got a response back from the university. He reached out to Dr. King to inform him of his plan to sue Troy State University for discrimination, but Dr. King offered him good advice, so he decided not to sue and returned to ABT.

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- While attending ABT, John attended James Lawson's workshops where he preached about the Gandhian Philosophy of Nonviolence.
 - Through this program, John and other Black students formed the Nashville Student Movement.
 - Nashville Student movement planned "sit-in" protests as a form of nonviolent protest. The students would go to restaurants, movies, and other segregated places to sit. Their plan was to fight for integration and equality.
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Nonviolent protest



- The sit-in protests made a lot of white businesses uncomfortable.
- While John and other Black students peacefully protested, they were beaten and harassed by White people.
- The picture on the left shows John's first arrest in 1960.
- After several months, restaurant owners and other business owners agreed to desegregate their businesses.

Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)

- After successfully desegregating restaurants in Nashville, John helped to form the SNCC in 1960.
- SNCC was a group created for young black youths to give them a voice and become part of the freedom movement.



Freedom riders

- In 1961, John Lewis was one of the freedom riders. The freedom riders were 13 activists who boarded buses in Washington, D.C., on May 4, 1961, to go to New Orleans. Their purpose was to tackle racial segregation on interstate travel. As they got closer to the south, it became dangerous for them. In North Carolina, the freedom riders were beaten and as they got to Alabama, one of their buses was set ablaze. They traveled with their second bus to Birmingham and were beaten nearly to death.

- Charles Person, a freedom rider details his experience in the link below.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1wGSMkZe_UI

The freedom riders were arrested in Jackson.





- The riders made it to New Orleans on May 17, 1961.
- The freedom riders achieved their goal. The government enforced federal laws of integration on an interstate level. The movement was successful.
- In 1961, John Lewis received his Bachelor's degree from ABT and was recognized as one of the most dedicated men in the movement by SCLC.

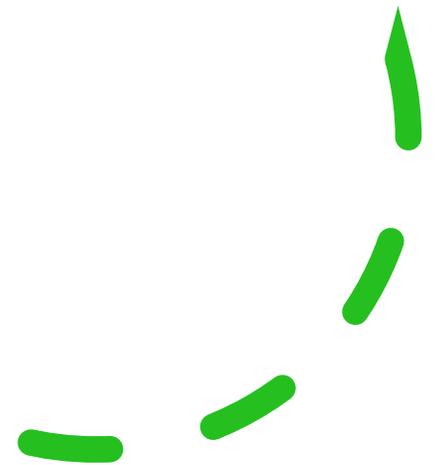
John Lewis as Chairman of SNCC



- In 1963, John was chosen to be the chairman of SNCC.
- By the time John Lewis was the chairman of SNCC, he had already been arrested 24 times. John dedicated his life to the movement because he did not mind being arrested or punished as long as Black people won their fight against racism and segregation.



- At age 23, John Lewis was the chairman of SNCC



March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom



- On August 28, 1963, John gave a speech on jobs and freedom that criticized the government.
- The link below is a video of his speech

https://youtu.be/TCqR9LbT1_w

Freedom Summer

- In 1964, freedom summer, John was involved in a voting campaign for African American voters. They set up community programs and voters registration drives to encourage African Americans to vote in Mississippi.



Bloody Sunday

- On March 7, 1965, John Lewis and Hosea Williams led a protest of hundreds of people in Selma, Alabama. The purpose of the march was to call on the government to outlaw discriminatory voting laws that prevented African American voters from voting.



- The peaceful march turned to a bloody Sunday when State troopers attacked protesters.
- John Lewis along with many others were severely injured. He suffered a fractured skull.



Exit from SNCC

- In 1966, John left SNCC because the organization was heading in a militant direction. The organization was forced to be violent because of the torment they have endured for so many years from racists. The new direction did not align with John's nonviolent commitment to himself, so he left.
- He continued his civil rights movement as head of voter registration.



YEAR: 1963 - 1966

TITLE: CHAIRMAN OF STUDENT NONVIOLENT COORDINATING COMMITTEE (SNCC)

IMPACT: COORDINATED STUDENT ACTIVISM IN THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT ACROSS THE SOUTH. ORGANIZED VOTER REGISTRATION DRIVES AND COMMUNITY ACTION PROGRAMS DURING MISSISSIPPI FREEDOM SUMMER

SOURCE: [HTTPS://JOHNLEWIS.HOUSE.GOV/JOHN-LEWIS](https://johnlewis.house.gov/john-lewis)



New journey

- In 1977, John ran for congress but lost to his opponent.

Congressman

- From 1982 to 1986, John served on Atlanta's city council
- In September 1986, John ran for congress again. He won the general election in November and was elected to the House of Representatives where he served 17 terms until his death in July 2020.

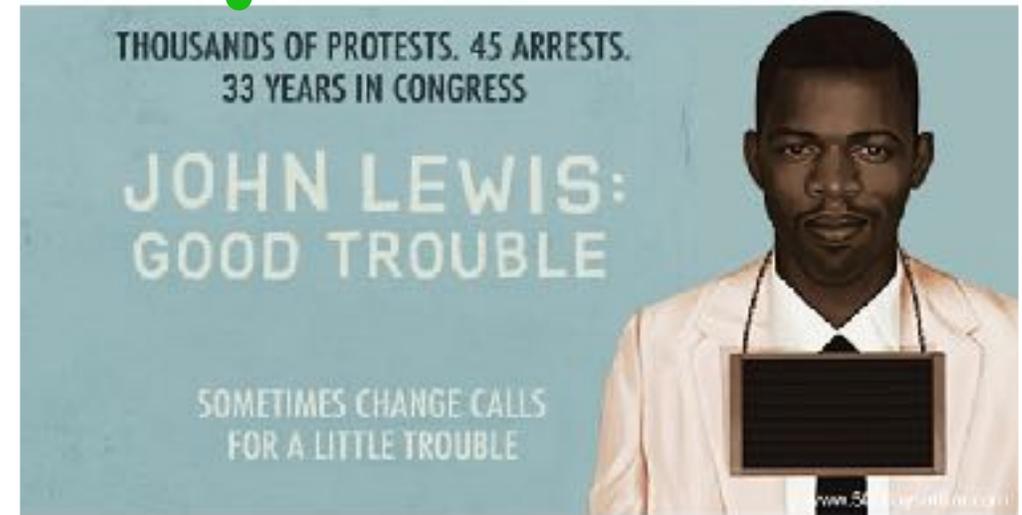


- While congressman John was serving the country, he still fought for minorities.
- The picture on the right portrays congressman John getting arrested for protesting genocide in Darfur, Sudan. He protested outside of the Sudan embassy in Washington, D.C.



Good trouble

- "You must find a way to get in the way and get in good trouble, necessary trouble. ... Good trouble, necessary trouble ... that is your calling. That is your mission. That is your moral obligation. That is your mandate. Get out there and do it. Get in the way"- John Lewis
- The term "Good trouble" means confronting racism and getting in the way in a manner that could be uncomfortable but has an end goal of success.





Honors

- On the 50th anniversary of Bloody Sunday, Former President Obama and his family joined John Lewis to march to Selma bridge.
- In 2011, John Lewis was presented with a presidential medal of freedom.
- He received many honorary degrees and awards.



Conclusion

- After a look at John Lewis' life, we can conclude that John devoted his life to the Black freedom movement. He was involved in many dangerous situations that could have resulted in the loss of life, but he fought and fought until he saw changes. Although before the passing of John Lewis, African Americans are still fighting for change. He was able to experience a new generation's fight for change. He was assured that his legacy was passed on to the younger generation.
- <https://youtu.be/cxJGuHKZc0g>

Citation

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