

Learn about and celebrate Black History: John Lewis



Advocate. Civil Rights Leader. Congressman.

"When you see something that is not right, not just, not fair, you have a moral obligation to say something, to do something."

Born in 1940, **John Lewis** was the son of sharecroppers and grew up on his family's farm in Alabama. He earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Religion and Philosophy from Fisk University and graduated from the American Baptist Theological Seminary in Nashville. John Lewis is perhaps best known for serving in the U.S. House of Representatives and being a leader in the Civil Rights Movement.



His activism began in college when he became a leader of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. At the age of 23, John Lewis was recognized as one of the "Big Six" leaders of the Civil Rights Movement and was one of the planners and speakers at the March on Washington in August 1963. His fight for equality extended throughout his entire life – and his legacy continues today.

- He led marchers across Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma on what became known as "Bloody Sunday" on March 7, 1965.
- In 1977, he was appointed by President Jimmy Carter to direct volunteers of ACTION, the federal volunteer agency.
- He was elected to the Atlanta City Council in 1981 until he resigned in 1986 to run for Congress.
- He served in the U.S. House of Representatives for Georgia's 5th congressional district from 1987 until his death in 2020.
- He was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2011 by President Barack Obama, honoring his lifetime of activism.

"Though I may not be here with you, I urge you to answer the highest calling of your heart and stand up for what you truly believe...When historians pick up their pens to write the story of the 21st century, let them say that it was your generation who laid down the heavy burdens of hate at last and that peace finally triumphed over violence, aggression and war."

To learn more about the life and legacy of John Lewis:

- <https://www.aclu.org/congressman-john-lewis>
- <https://www.npr.org/2020/07/19/890796423/civil-rights-leader-john-lewis-never-gave-up-or-gave-in>
- <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/30/opinion/john-lewis-civil-rights-america.html>

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Want to learn about more advocates who have made an impact throughout history?

- **Stacey Abrams** – Born in 1973, Stacey Abrams is an author and politician who is currently running for Governor of Georgia – a position she ran for in 2018 as well, becoming the first Black woman to be the gubernatorial nominee for a major party in America. However, she is probably best known for being an incredible voting rights advocate. She has founded several organizations, including Fair Fight, to protect voting rights and encourage civic engagement. ([Learn more here.](#))
- **Dr. Kira Banks** – Local changemaker, Dr. Kira Banks is a professor at SLU, author, and racial equity consultant and advocate. She co-founded the Institute for Healing Justice and Equity at SLU. Her work has helped frame racial equity in the St. Louis area. ([Learn more here.](#))
- **Shirley Chisholm** – Born in 1924, Shirley Chisholm was the first African American woman in Congress (elected in 1968) and the first woman and African American to seek the nomination for president from one of the major political parties. She was an advocate for women and minorities throughout her life – making an impact on both anti-poverty policy and educational reform. ([Learn more here.](#))

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