

Civil Rights and the Press Symposium
U.S. Representative John Lewis, D-Ga.

Sunday, April 25, 2004

Professor Richard Dubin: Good morning. How's everybody doing? My name is Richard Dubin. I teach here in the Television-Radio-Film department. Charlotte Grimes asked me to introduce our guest this morning, and I'm deeply honored to do so. He's a man I've known for many minutes. I, of course, have been aware of him for much longer. As a kid growing up in New York City, a young musician, I spent considerable time in Harlem. I read a paper there called The Amsterdam News. I remember reading about John Lewis. While other figures may have gotten more attention, John Lewis stuck in my mind because I knew a piano player by the same name. I was confused. I said, "What's John Lewis doing down there getting mixed up in all this trouble?" Of course, it was a different John Lewis. The other one being of The Modern Jazz Quartet – him, Connie Kay, Percy Heath, and Milt Jackson. A John Lewis of a whole other kind.

So the name John Lewis stuck in my head. I followed what he was doing. I can't claim to have had any sophisticated appreciation of the movement at that point. I was preoccupied with learning chord changes, getting my chops together, stuff like that. But I was surrounded by and mentored by many black men – then they were "colored," about to be "Negroes." They would tell stories of traveling through the South, and all the indignities that they endured, and finding places to stay. They'd have to stay in people's houses, and sleep in uncomfortable circumstances, had difficulty getting food on the road. I'd always hear these stories surrounded by laughter. These stories were told with great joy. So I was a little confused about it all. I really didn't have a genuine appreciation of what John Lewis was doing.

I knew it was important, but I didn't have an appreciation until I got a little glimpse of the world of John Lewis in 1963 when I went to Birmingham, Ala. I went to Birmingham with a show that was produced by someone called Joey Adams. I don't know if any of you remember Joey Adams when he was a comedian. He was married to Cindy Adams, who many more of you probably knew as a columnist in the New York Post. Joey Adams, at that point, was the president of a union called AGVA – the American Guild Variety Arts. The American Guild of Variety Artists organized a show that went to Birmingham. Included The Shirelles, Ray Charles, Nina Simone, Johnny Mathis. Its significance was two-fold: it was designed to raise money for the march on Washington that was upcoming soon thereafter, and to also be the first integrated show ever in the state of Alabama. It was integrated by three and three-fourths white people. I was the three-fourths, and there were three other guys.

We went to Birmingham on private turbojets. We left from Marine Field, adjacent to LaGuardia Airport – since been renamed, I don't know what. We flew down to Birmingham, Alabama. I remember beautiful, billowy clouds when we got there. I'm about to see John Lewis's world. We arrive at the airport. We can't take cabs. We can't do anything like that. Private citizens organized to transport this big show in their own automobiles to Gaston's Motel. Those of you who know

Birmingham know that that was where black people stayed in those days – colored people about to be Negroes, excuse me – stayed at Gaston's. That's where we stayed.

This show was supposed to take place at the Civic Center. At the last minute, the permission to use the Civic Center was lifted, in an effort clearly to stop the show. But shows don't stop so easily. A bunch of local carpenters and other people, black men – colored, about to be Negroes, at that point – went out to Miles College on the outskirts of town and built a stage that afternoon for a show that night. Put together a stage. We rehearsed at a high school, not far from Gaston's. After the rehearsal, we came out and I met at a reasonable distance, Bull Connor, his dogs – they were there. I had seen these folks in the newspaper, but now I'm looking at them. They didn't look nearly as friendly. There was this very tense atmosphere.

We went back to Gaston's, took a little rest. We were transported later that evening, again by cars, out to Miles College. Sixteen thousand people showed up at Miles College. We saw them on our way there because, obviously, there was no public transportation to Miles College. People got up and walked, carrying chairs, blankets, flashlights. And they walked through the city of Birmingham out to Miles College for this show. In the middle of this show, the stage, which was built just hours before, and really not suited to handle a show of this size, collapsed. In the middle of Johnny Mathis's act actually. He was singing "I Got a Lot of Livin' to Do." I'm sitting back in the trumpets section, and I see Johnny Mathis dive off the stage. I said, "Well, I don't remember this from rehearsal." The stage collapsed underneath us.

William B. Williams, whom some of you may remember from the Maple Leaf Ballroom, was the emcee and one of the white guys. I fell off the back of the stage. Joe Louis, who was there, Thad Jones, who was my section mate in the trumpets section, two big men, stood over me to see if I was okay. I fell over backwards, had my trumpet on my chest protecting it. I was fine. Sixteen thousand voices sang, "We Shall Overcome." And it changed my life. I now understood what was going on. All these years later, I am really pleased to be here and introduce someone who, if greeted with a traditional jazzman's line – which is "How ya livin'?" – can justifiably say, "Like a legend." Ladies and gentlemen, John Lewis.

Congressman John Lewis: Good morning. Thank you for those kind words of introduction. Let me just say that I'm delighted, very happy, and very pleased to be here. I see so many of my wonderful, unbelievable, extraordinary friends from the media. I would make a serious mistake if I start calling any names, but it's good to see each and every one of you. You look so good, you look so wonderful.

I don't know where to start. But I will say this up front: Without the media, the civil rights movement would have been like a bird without wings. The press played a major role in communicating and spreading the news of the civil rights movement. I want to start by saying I didn't grow up in a big city like Syracuse. I didn't grow up in a big city like New York City or Atlanta or Chicago or Detroit or Philadelphia. I grew up on a farm 50 miles from Montgomery, near a little place called Troy. My father was a sharecropper. Back in 1944, when I was 4 years old, and I do remember when I was 4, my father had saved 300 dollars and with the 300 dollars, he bought 110 acres of land. That's a lot of land for 300 dollars. Several members of my family are still living on this land.

On this farm, there is a lot of cotton, corn, peanuts, hogs, cows and chickens. If any of you come to Washington and visit my Congressional office, the first thing the staff will offer you will be a Coca-Cola because Atlanta and Georgia happen to be the home of the Coca-Cola Company. Coca-Cola provides all members of the Georgia Congressional Delegation with an adequate supply of Coca-Cola products. Every now and then, I may have a Diet Coke. The next thing the staff will offer you will be some peanuts because in the state of Georgia, like in the state of Alabama, we raise a lot of peanuts. I don't eat too many of those peanuts. I ate so many peanuts when I was growing up in rural Alabama, I just don't want to see another peanut. Years ago, we would get on a flight and fly from Atlanta to Washington or Washington back to Atlanta. The flight attendant tried to push some peanuts on me. I said, "No, thank you. I don't care for your peanuts."

Some of the journalists here know that when I was very young, it was my responsibility to care for the chickens. I fell in love with raising chickens, like no one else could raise chickens. Let me tell you what I had to do as a young black boy brought up in rural Alabama during the '40s and the '50s. They take the fresh eggs, marked with a pencil, place them under the hen, and wait for three long weeks for the chicks to hatch. I know some smart journalist, some smart professor is saying, "John Lewis, why did you mark this fresh egg with a pencil before you placed them under the hen?" Well, from time to time, another year, we'd get on the same nest and there will be some more eggs. You had to be able to tell the fresh eggs from the eggs already under the hen. You follow me? You don't follow me – that's okay.

When these little chicks were hatched, I would fool the hen – I would cheat on this hen. I would take these chicks, give them to another hen, put them in a box with a lantern, raise them on their own, get some more fresh eggs, mark them with a pencil, place them under the hen, nest for another three weeks. I look back on it, it was not the right thing to do. It's not the moral thing to do. It was not the most loving thing to do. It was not the most nonviolent thing to do. But I was never quite able to save \$18.98 to order the most inexpensive incubator from the Sears-Roebuck store. They sold everything from Sears-Roebuck's store. Some of you may be old enough to remember. We used to get a catalog,

the big catalog. Some people called it the ordering book. Some people called it the wish book. I wish I had this, I wish I had that, so I kept on wishing.

When I was about 8 years old, I wanted to be a minister. So one of my uncles had Santa Claus to bring a bible, and I learned to read the bible. So from time to time, with the help of my brothers and sisters and our first cousin, we would get all of our chickens together in the chicken yard, in the chicken house, like you're gathered here in this room, and we would have church. My brothers and sisters and my first cousin would make up the congregation, and I started preaching. I noticed some of these chickens would bow their heads; some of these chickens would shake their heads. They never quite said "Amen." But I'm convinced that some of those chickens that I preached to in the '40s and in the '50s tended to listen to me much better than some of my colleagues listen to me today in the Congress. As a matter of fact, some of these chickens are a little more productive and, at least they produced eggs. Well, that's enough of that story.

When we would visit a little town of Troy or visit Montgomery or visit Tuskegee, I saw those signs that said, "White Men," "Colored Men." I saw those signs that said "White Women", "Colored Women." I saw those signs that said, "White Waiting," "Colored Waiting." As a young child, I tasted the bitter fruits of segregation and racial discrimination, and I didn't like it.

In 1955, the age of 15, in the 10th grade, I heard of Rosa Parks. I heard of Martin Luther King, Jr. And I followed the drama that was taking place in Montgomery, Alabama, just 50 miles away. Ray, we couldn't afford a subscription to The Alabama Journal or The Montgomery Advertiser. But my grandfather had a subscription to the paper. When he would finish reading his paper each day, we would go down and get this paper to read it. We listened to the radio, we read the newspaper to follow what was happening in Montgomery. When I heard Martin Luther King, Jr. speaking on the radio, I felt like he was speaking to me. Saying, "John Lewis, you can do something. You can make a contribution."

In 1956, at the age of 16, in the summer my brothers and sisters and first cousin, we went down to the little library – Pike County Public Library in the little town of Troy, Alabama, trying to get a library card, trying to check some books out. We were told by the librarian that the library was for whites only, and not for coloreds. But on July 5th, 1998, I went back to the Pike County Public Library for a book signing of my book, "Walking with the Wind." Hundreds of blacks and white citizens showed up, and they gave me a library card. It says something about the distance we're coming America in laying down the burden of race.

When I finished high school in May of 1957, at the age of 17, I wanted to attend Troy State College. It's known today as Troy State University. Though I understand last week they just changed it to Troy University. I submitted my application, my high school transcript. I never heard a word from this school. Not one word. So in the meantime, I applied to a little college in Nashville,

Tennessee. I was accepted. But I also wrote a letter to Martin Luther King, Jr., and told Dr. King that I wanted to attend Troy State. Dr. King wrote me back and sent me a roundtrip Greyhound bus ticket and invited me to come to Montgomery to meet with him. I didn't tell my mother, my father, or any of my sisters or brothers, that I sent this letter to Dr. King.

In September, 1957, an uncle of mine gave me a hundred dollar bill, more money than I ever had. Gave me a footlocker. I put all my books, my clothing, everything that I owned – except those chickens – in that footlocker and went off to school in Nashville. I was in school there for a few days. I told one of the teachers, a young man named Kelly Miller Smith, wonderful young leader who was a friend of Dr. King. And he informed Dr. King that I was in Nashville. Dr. King suggested when I was home for spring break that I come to see him.

On a Saturday morning in March of 1958, my father drove me to the Greyhound bus station. I boarded that bus. I traveled 50 miles from Troy to Montgomery. I arrived in downtown Montgomery. I didn't know what I was going to do. A young lawyer by the name of Fred Gray, who was a lawyer for Rosa Parks and Dr. King in the Montgomery movement, met me at the Greyhound bus station and drove me to the First Baptist Church on Ripler Street past by the Reverend Ralph Abernathy. They ushered me in to the office of the church, and I saw Martin Luther King, Jr. and Ralph Abernathy standing behind a desk. Dr. King spoke up and said, "Are you the boy from Troy? Are you John Lewis?" I spoke up and said, "Dr. King, I am John Robert Lewis." I gave my whole name. I don't know why, but I think I was trying to make the point that I was the right person. That was the beginning of my involvement with Martin Luther King, Jr. and my involvement with the movement.

I continued to study in Nashville. Well, many of us as young people and students started studying the philosophy and discipline. Studied the great religions of the world. Studied what Gandhi attempted to do in South Africa, what he accomplished in India. Studied what Martin Luther King, Jr. was all about in Montgomery. The end of the day came, under the leadership of Jim Lawson, one of the leaders there. A young man who had been a student at Vanderbilt Divinity School. We started sitting in at lunch counters and restaurants in an orderly, peaceful, nonviolent fashion... waiting to be served. Someone would come up and spit on us. Put a lighted cigarette out in our hair and down our backs. Pull us off the lunch counter schools. Then, on February 27, 1960, the first mass arrest occurred in the sit-in movement. The students had started sitting in Greensboro, North Carolina, on February 1st. And the sit-ins spread all across the South like wildfire.

The media played a major role. People started saying, if they could do it in Greensboro, North Carolina, if they could do it in Raleigh or Durham, if they could do it in Nashville or Chattanooga or Memphis or Jackson or Atlanta, then we could do it. Some said by sitting down, we were really standing up.

When I was growing up, my mother, my father, my grandparents and great-grandparents always told us, if we asked about segregation and racial discrimination – “That’s the way it is. Don’t get in the way. Don’t get in trouble.” Many of us as young people during the ‘60s – we got in the way, we got in trouble. It was good trouble. It was necessary trouble to change America. I don’t know where America would be today if it hadn’t been for the media telling the story of what happened and how it happened. The cities’ well-dressed young people sitting in, sitting down, and then someone come up, beating him, arresting him, and charging him with disorderly conduct. Disturbing the peace. Trespassing. Breach of the peace.

With dignity and with pride, many of us went to jail. Years later, after the sit-in, standing at the theaters, we went on something called the “Freedom Ride.” Just think, a few short years ago in American South, it would be almost impossible for an interracial group to board a Greyhound bus in Washington, D.C., and travel through North Carolina, South Carolina or Virginia or Georgia, Alabama or Mississippi. The “Freedom Ride” was to test a Supreme Court decision. To make it real. And we did. I happen to think, in spite of what the media did, and the contributions that the media made, I think the “Freedom Ride” probably is one of the untold stories of the movement.

When I was a student in Nashville, we would have these meetings and people would say, “What should we do? Should we march? Should we have a sit-in? Should we have a stand-in?” I always said, “We should march.” We should go and dramatize the issue. Believe in drama. In a sense, we all participated in the great drama. But this drama kept changing America and changing America forever. Just think, a few short years ago, after the “Freedom Ride,” after the march on Washington, after the bombing of the church in Birmingham where the four little girls were killed, after the Mississippi summer project, almost 40 years ago, June 21, 1964, three young men – Andy Goodman, Mickey Schwerner – white – and James Chaney – African-American – went out to investigate the burning of a black church. These three young men that I knew were detained by the sheriff, arrested, later taken to jail. The same night, they were turned over to the Klan, beaten, shot and killed. These three young men didn’t die in Africa or the Middle East or Eastern Europe. They didn’t die in Central or South America. They died right here in our own country for the right of all of us citizens to become participants in the democratic process. That was a sad and dark hour for the movement.

But we didn’t give up. We didn’t give in. We didn’t give out. We didn’t get lost in a sea of despair. We kept the faith. President Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 on July 2, 1964. He won a landslide election. Martin Luther King, Jr. received the Nobel Peace Prize in December, 1964. Come back and held a meeting with President Johnson at the White House and tell the president we need a strong voting rights act. President Johnson told Dr. King in so many

words, we don't have enough votes in the Congress to get a voting rights act passed. Martin Luther King, Jr. met with a group of us and said we would write that act. The state of Mississippi had a black voting-age population of more than 450,000. Only about 16,000 blacks were registered to vote.

The county was more than 80 percent African-American, but there was not a single registered African-American voter. In the little town of Selma, Alabama, only 2.1 percent of blacks of voting age were registered to vote. On one occasion there was a black man who had a Ph.D. degree, he flunked the so-called literacy test. He was told he could not read or write well enough. On another occasion, a man was asked to give the number of bubbles in a bar of soap. People asked to interpret some section of the constitution of the state of Alabama, or Georgia, or Mississippi. In Selma, Alabama, you can only attempt to register on the first and third Mondays of each month. And the only place you could attempt to register was the county courthouse.

After the bombing of the church in Birmingham, we had what we called "Freedom Day" in Selma on October 8, 1963. Where people stood in line all day just trying to get inside the courthouse, up some steps, and get a copy of the so-called literacy tests. I remember a few years later, it was my day to lead a group of people to the courthouse. The exact date was January 8, 1965. I had all of my hair. I was a few pounds lighter. Sheriff Clark met us at the top of the steps. Sheriff Clark was a very big man. He wore a gun on one side, a nightstick on the other side, and he carried an electric cattle prodder in his hand, and he didn't use it on cows. The press played a major role, an unbelievable role, showing the contrast between Sheriff Clark, his deputies and any citizen waiting trying to become registered. Sheriff Clark walked up to me and said, "John Lewis, you're an outside agitator. You're the lowest form of humanity." I looked him straight in the eye and said, "Sheriff, I may be an agitator, but I'm not an outsider. I grew up only 90 miles from here, and we're going to stay here until these people are allowed to register to vote." Then he said, "You're under arrest." He arrested me along with a few other people. We went to jail.

A few days later, Martin Luther King, Jr., Reverend Abernathy and others came to Selma. We filled the city jail. More than 300 people arrested in one day. The city jail, the county jail. A few days later, and some of you were here, some of you were there, in a little town called Marion, Alabama, you remember. There was a demonstration one evening. A confrontation occurred. A young man by the name of Jimmy Lee Jackson was shot in the stomach by a state trooper. A few days later, he died at the Good Samaritan Hospital in Selma. Members of the media were beaten. Because of what happened to Jimmy Lee Jackson 39 years ago this past March, we made a decision to march from Selma to Montgomery to dramatize to the nation and to the world that people of color wanted to register to vote.

On Sunday, March 7, 1965, about 600 of us met at a little church called Brown Chapel AME Church. All members of the media here know that church and they know it so well. We conducted a nonviolent workshop. We had a prayer. Then we lined up in twos, to walk in an orderly, peaceful, nonviolent fashion from Selma to Montgomery. I was asked by some of the people in the SCLC (Southern Christian Leadership Conference) because my organization which is another story – SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) – had opposed to march. But they said I could march as an individual if I wanted to, but not as chair of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. We lined up in twos to walk through the streets of Selma across Edmund Pettus Bridge to go to Montgomery. Some of you may notice, especially the photographers, and members of the press that were there on that day, I was wearing a backpack before they became fashionable to wear backpacks. In this backpack, I had two books, an apple, an orange, toothbrush and toothpaste. I thought we were going to be arrested, and that we were going to go to jail. So I wanted to have something to read, something to eat, and since I was going to be in close quarters with my friends, colleagues, and neighbors, I wanted to be able to brush my teeth.

We get to the edge of the Pettis Bridge, cross the Alabama River, saw all of this water down below. Jose Williams, from Dr. King's organization, walked up beside me. Jose said, "John, can you swim?" I said, "No. Jose, can you swim?" He said, "No." I said, "Well, there's too much water down there. We're not going to jump. We're not going back. We're going forward." We continued to walk. We came to the high point on the bridge. Down below, we saw a sea of blue, Alabama state troopers. And behind the state troopers, you saw Sheriff Clark, deputies, and members of his posse. We came within hearing distance of the state troopers. A man identified himself and said, "I'm Major John Cloud of Alabama state troopers. This is an unlawful march. It will not be allowed to continue. I'll give you three minutes to disperse and return to your church." In less than a minute and a half, Major Cloud said, "Troopers advance." You saw these men putting on their gas masks. They came towards us, beating us with nightsticks and bullwhips, trampling us with horses, releasing the tear gas. I was hit in the head by a state trooper with a nightstick. I thought I was going to die. I thought I saw death.

Thirty-nine years later, I don't know how I made it back across that bridge through the streets of Selma back to that little church. But I do recall being back at the church that Sunday afternoon, the church was full to capacity. More than 2,000 people on the outside trying to get in to protest what had happened on the bridge. Someone asked me to say something. I stood up and said something like, "I don't understand this. How President Johnson can send troops to Vietnam, but cannot send troops to Selma, Alabama, to protect people who want to desire to register to vote." The next thing I knew, I had been admitted to the Good Samaritan Hospital there in Selma.

Early that Monday morning, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Reverend Abernathy came by to visit, and Dr. King said, "Don't worry, John. We'll make it from Selma to Montgomery. The Voting Rights Act will be passed." He issued a call for more than a thousand religious leaders to come to Selma: priests, rabbis, nuns, and others came and marched to support what we had been beaten for two days earlier. We went into federal court, got an injunction against the officials of Alabama and Selma, unbelievable judge named Frank M. Johnson, who subpoenaed the film footage from Bloody Sunday. Judge Johnson saw that film footage, said that he was moved, so disturbed, he granted us everything that we wanted. And 300 others were allowed to walk all the way from Selma to Montgomery.

But in the meantime, President Johnson called Governor Wallace to come to Washington to try to get assurance from him that he would be able to protect us if we decided to march again. President Johnson could not get that assurance from Governor Wallace. President Johnson federalized Alabama and National Guards. But he also made one of the most meaningful speeches any American president has made in modern times on the whole question of voting rights and civil rights. The speech that Lyndon Johnson made on March 15, 1965, when he spoke to a joint session of the Congress and spoke to the nation. He started his speech off that night by saying, "I speak tonight for the dignity of man and for the destiny of democracy." President Johnson went on to say, "At times history and fate meet in a single place in man's unending search for freedom. So it was more than a century ago at Lexington and at Concord. So it was at Appomattox. So it was last week at Selma, Alabama." He condemned the violence in Selma. He introduced the Voting Rights Act. In his speech, he said, "We shall overcome" for the first time in the history of our country, to hear the president of the United States of America, citing the theme song of the civil rights movement, and we shall overcome.

I was sitting next to Martin Luther King, Jr. in the home of a local family in Selma. Tears came down his face, he started crying. And we all cried a little to hear President Johnson say, "And we shall overcome." The Congress debated the Voting Rights Act, passed it, and the president signed it into law on August 6, 1965. Because of the Civil Rights Act of '64, the Voting Rights Act of '65, the cost of the involvement of hundreds and thousands and millions of citizens - and the cost of the role of the media, we have witnessed in American South what I'd like to call a nonviolent revolution - a revolution of values, a revolution of ideas. The region is a better region. And we are a better people.

Sometimes I hear - especially young people saying today - "Nothing has changed." I feel like saying, "Come and walk in my shoes, and I'll show you things have changed."

After I got elected to Congress, and I'll just make this little point, and then I'll be finished, they had John Lewis Day in a little town near Troy. They had my high school classmates, and schoolmates had John Lewis Day in this little town. The

local banker – white – he’s also the mayor of the little town. The local Coca-Cola bottling company all sponsored this effort. They put these big signs, “Welcome Home, John Lewis.” They invited the Troy State University Band to lead the parade through the town. The chancellor, Dr. Adams, came up to me and said, “John Lewis. We heard years ago that you wanted to attend Troy State. We would like for you to come back. We would like for you to come.” I went back a year or so later and they gave me an honorary degree. So when I go to Troy State University to speak now from time to time, I tell the students there, “I got my education and my degree from Troy State the easy way.”

The point I would like to close on, I think what the movement was all about. I think the press, members of the media, whether it been pencils or electronic or whether it been photographers, they made an unbelievable contribution. Because the movement was about bringing people together, about reconciliation, about feeling a sense of community, feeling a sense of family, feeling what I like to call “one house.”

I’m going to close with this little story. When I was growing up outside of Troy, Alabama, 50 miles from Montgomery, I had an aunt and her name was Seneva. My Aunt Seneva lived in what we call a shotgun house. How many of you know what a shotgun house is? Oh, that’s pretty good. My Aunt Seneva lived in a shotgun house. She didn’t have a green, manicured lawn. She had a simple, plain dirt yard. Sometimes at night, you could look up through the holes in the ceiling, the holes in the tin roof, and count the stars. When it would rain, she would get a pail, a bucket, a tub – as some of us call it, the tin tub or the foot tub – and catch the rainwater. I know what I’m talking about because I was born in a shotgun house.

From time to time, she’d walk out into the woods and take branches from a dogwood tree and tie these branches together and she would make a broom. She called that broom the brush broom. She would sweep the dirt yard very clean, sometimes two and three times a week. But especially on a Friday or Saturday because she wanted that dirt yard to look very good on a weekend, especially on a Sunday.

My Aunt Seneva lived in a shotgun house. For those of you who don’t know what a shotgun house is. In a nonviolent sense, a shotgun house, old house, one way in, one way out, where you can bounce a basketball through the front and it will go straight out the back door. In the military sense, a shotgun house, old house, one way in, one way out, where you can fire a shotgun through the front and the bullets would go straight through the back door. My Aunt Seneva lived in a shotgun house.

One Saturday afternoon, a group of my brothers and sisters and a few of my first cousins, about 12 or 15 of us young children, were playing in my Aunt Seneva’s dirt yard. An unbelievable storm came up. The wind started blowing, the thunder

started rolling, the lightning started flashing, and the rain started beating on the tin roof of this old shotgun house. My aunt became terrified. She started crying. She thought this old house was going to blow away. She got all us little children together and told us to hold hands. And we all started crying.

The wind continued to blow, the thunder continued to roll, the lightning continued to flash, and the rain continued to beat on the tin roof of this old shotgun house. And when one corner of this old house appeared to be lifting from its foundation, my aunt had us to walk to that corner to try to hold the house down with our little bodies. When the other side appeared to be lifted, my aunt had us to walk to that side and try to hold this house down with our little bodies. We were little children walking with the wind, but we never, ever left the house.

That's what the American civil rights movement was all about. Trying to hold the American house together. It was saying, in effect, that we all live in the same house. That it doesn't matter whether we are black or white or Hispanic or Asian-American or Native American, we are one people. We are one family. We are one house. Just maybe, our foremothers and our forefathers all came to this great country, to this great land, in different ships. The movement was saying - But we're all in the same boat now. Saying, in effect, that we must continue to do what we can. To build what Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. called, "the beloved community." A truly interracial democracy. So as we continue this journey, to make America what America should be, hang in there. Keep the faith. Keep your eyes on the prize. Walk with the wind. And let the spirit of freedom be your guide. Thank you very much.

Thank you very much. I'm going to take a few questions. Members of the media, thank you for all that you've done. You guys, you ladies that have been part of this battle. It was very dangerous to be a journalist. It was dangerous to be a journalist. It was dangerous to have a pad and a pencil. It was dangerous to have a camera. You two put your bodies on the line. I want to say thank you. Thank each and every one of you. You probably saved us. You probably have saved America. You probably never received the honor that you should have received. Thank you. I want to say that from the bottom of my heart. Maybe one day, some of us - Jack, and John, and Ray, and John, Charlie - maybe we can find some way to make it happen.

I know that we fight battles abroad, from time to time they honor journalists. But we got a war here at home, and you all were the soldiers. Thank you.

Audience Question: The evening before we went to war in Iraq, the Black Congressional Caucus was there saying, "Are we going to have a vote on this war? Are we going to declare war?" I got to applaud the Black Congressional Caucus for that. And for what's been done about Haiti. But, at the same time, there's been talk of impeaching Bush for going to war. Congress needs to be impeached for not taking the bone. Maybe the Black Congressional Caucus

should be the only people not impeached.

Congressman Lewis: You're voicing some frustration. We all are. That members of Congress are very, not just frustrated, but there's a growing sense of righteous indignation. Some people, even Congress, are just afraid. They're afraid. This is an election year. Some people are afraid of their shadows. People don't have, what I call, raw courage to stand out. This president, the road he's taken us down, I don't think the spirit of history will be kind to us as a nation and as a people. This war was unnecessary. But it's my feeling, and I've said it on the floor of the House, and I'll probably say it more during the next few years, I think a group of people had made up their mind long before President Bush took the oath of office that we were going to have a war. I don't care what you call it, "We're going to have a war. We're going to get rid of Saddam Hussein. And we're going to go into Iraq."

Audience Question: You used to be head of the Voter Education Project. Are the blacks going to get out this year and really vote? That's going to be extremely important.

Congressman Lewis: Jack, I was down in South Georgia. I was down at America's last night. It was a crowd there, it was just unbelievable. One line that I use from time to time, and others are using this line, you know, you could tell us, "Be quiet, and don't talk about what happened in 2000." I said, "How can we not talk about what happened in 2000 in Florida?" People died for the right to vote. The people go crazy. I think we're going to have a massive turnout. Some of us, not just myself, but a lot of us are going to get out, going to travel and live and breathe for this country to inspire people to get up, get out, go to the polls, and vote like you've never voted before.

Follow-up: Are they registering as well?

Congressman Lewis: Yes, they are.

Audience Question: The role of the churches was so crucial in the civil rights movement. What are your feelings when you hear things about George Bush speaking with the Father Almighty before going to war? The prayers.

Congressman Lewis: Well, that's troublesome. I really don't know how to respond to that. We all think we're communicating with somebody from time to time. But, maybe we're communicating or talking with a different god. I think it's necessary. The President of the United States talking to a different power, a different father. I just don't know. I think sometimes people here at home and people around the world are saying, "Have we lost our way? Have we lost our way? Have we lost our sense of direction, our sense of great purpose as a nation, as a proud people?" What is our role? Are we to put out every fire? No one called us. No one ordained us to be the savior, the keeper of the hopes and

dreams of the world. Something is going, and something's going wrong. Somehow the American people have to rise up and say, "We're going to take our country back, we're going to take our government back. It's not going to be controlled by a handful of people who think somebody spoke to them one night or they had a dream or vision or something."

Audience Question: When I teach my students about the civil rights movement, what do you think I ought to be emphasizing? I try to talk about grass roots organizations because I want something that will relate to them as young people. A lot of them aren't leaders. They flounder. What should I tell them about the civil rights movement?

Congressman Lewis: First of all, talk about the young people. "These people are just young; just ordinary, young people just like you. They were just young." Tell them they didn't have a fax machine. They didn't have an e-mail address. They didn't have a cellular telephone. They believed in the Constitution. Some of them got a little education here and there. They've been deeply inspired. Some of us came of age during the Kennedy campaign of 1960, and Martin Luther King, Jr., and we saw what was happening around the world. We got involved. We got in the way.

But you also must tell your students, that we just didn't wake up one day and say "We're going to sit in." We just didn't wake up one day and say "We're going on a 'Freedom Ride,'" or "We're going to march from Selma to Washington." We studied. We conducted those nonviolent workshops in Nashville. It was almost the entire school year. Every Tuesday night at 6:30 pm, we'd meet at a little church and we studied. We organized. We had what we call "role playing" – social drama, where whites and blacks would play different roles. Sometimes there would be an interracial group playing the roles of blacks, an interracial group playing the roles of whites. You have to plan, you have to organize, you have to train people.

Audience Question: I'd like to know, in journalism, we have this thing that's called the forward spin of the story. That is, what's next? What is the next thing in this civil rights story? There's a school of thought that says that "Civil rights is yesterday, it's history, and that black people now have integration, and so what else do you want?" So, from your perspective, what is the forward spin on this civil rights story?

Congressman Lewis: It's that the struggle is an ongoing struggle. That it's not over. It is not over. The scars and stains of racism are still deeply embedded in American society. It is not just a problem of African-Americans, it's a problem of all Americans. I happen to believe that health care, for example. Health care. In Congress, I served on the Ways and Means Committee. I served on the subcommittee on health. I happen to believe that access to health is a right, it's not a privilege. That all of our citizens should have equality health care. I tell

young people, and people not so young, that we should organize, get out and protest around the cause of health the same way we did around public accommodation, and for the right to vote.

You're trying to hold the question of the environment. These people in Washington trying to do clean air, clean water, public lands and parks. They want to take us back to another period. And the American people are just too quiet. Too quiet. We need to make some noise. And it need not be African-American movement. But it needs to be where Dr. King left off in 1968, a people's movement. Because you have dirty water, dirty air, it's not just going to affect blacks, it's going to affect all of us.

Audience Question: Would you point to any particular accomplishments in your Congressional service as something that inspires your work?

Congressman Lewis: One piece of legislation that I got passed with the help of a lot of my friends and colleagues in Congress that I take a great deal of pride in it – for about 15 years, I've been in Congress – this is my 18th year, for about almost 15 years, I've tried to get passed in Congress a piece of legislation to create a national African-American museum on the mall to tell the story and the contributions of African-Americans. President Bush signed it into law, and we have a commissioner working to make that real. So I take a great deal, it's not my work alone, one year we got it through the House, one session of Congress. But we couldn't get it through the Senate because a former Senator from North Carolina put a hold on it. I think it was Senator Dole and Senator Mitchell who came to me and said, "John, we don't have anything that we could trade just then, or to have a deal that we can make with them." So it died.

Another time, we had it through the Senate, but didn't get it through the house. But now it is law. And it is going to happen. It's going to happen on our watch. I introduced legislation between Selma and Montgomery – that 50-mile stretch – part of the National Historic Trail. So now you have the U.S. Department of Transportation, the Alabama Department of Transportation, and the towns between Selma and Montgomery, and Selma and Montgomery, places, markers, and kiosks all along the lake telling the story. So when generations get on board, come along, and students and young people that were not even around, not even a dream, they will be able to go on that highway and see this is a part of American history, this is what happened, this is how we opened up our democracy. In addition to doing a few other things.

Audience Question: Do you think looking at us (younger generation), do you sometimes feel that we don't appreciate the work that your generation did or the civil rights movement, that we just don't have enough passion about the issues today?

Congressman Lewis: No, I would never say that. I have a young son. If I put

down the young people, I put down my son and a lot of my nieces and nephews and others. So I don't want to be accused of putting down anyone. I just think that we need to take the time to educate, to help inspire.

There's a lot of wonderful things happening. We were together – John Seigenthaler – in Nashville. In Nashville, they recently built a new library, a Nashville public library. But in that beautiful, unbelievable building, they have something called the “Civil Rights Room.” One young couple gave a large sum of money – a million dollars – for that room to be built. When you walk in that room, you're really walking through history. You feel it. You can almost taste it. I don't know how to describe it. The unbelievable photographs from the civil rights movement. And then the sands, the words, the timeline. They have something like a lunch counter in the round with stools. You walk around it. You see what happened in Nashville. You walk there, and for someone who was there, I saw photographs I've never seen, and everything just came back to me. When Dr. King came there to speak once, something I said back in 1960 is there, I was overcome and I cried.

I wish every young person, every student, I wish every American would have the opportunity to go to Birmingham to walk through the park where Bull Connor used the dogs. To go through the Civil Rights Museum there. To go to Montgomery. To go to the Rosa Parks Museum. You go to the Rosa Parks Museum, you feel like you've been on that bus with Rosa Parks. Go to the Civil Rights Memorial. Go to Memphis. Everybody cannot do that. But we need to find a way to have education, and maybe just maybe these images will serve as inspiration for people. People need to know that another generation with limited resources did something. Today, we're so advanced, we have the technology to do so much more, and people just need to see it.

Out in California, I met a high school history teacher back in 1998 when I was on the book tour. This young history teacher was so moved, he started organizing high school students in groups of 100 --and I spoke to every single group that made it to Atlanta. They take 10 days in groups of 100. They're black, they're white, they're Hispanic, Asian-American and Native American. They come with parents, teachers, sometimes the superintendent, and they travel 10 days through the South. They come to Atlanta. They get on buses. They go to Tuskegee; they go to Montgomery, Selma, Birmingham, Jackson, Mississippi, Little Rock, and Memphis. Those young people are going to be different. They're studying and learning the civil rights movement.

We all won't be able to do that. But we need to teach our children. Show them “Eyes on the Prize,” show them the literature, show them the unbelievable images. You saw the Life cover that was there a few minutes ago. This young man was the photographer. He used his camera. Charles Moore used his camera to tell a story. Very powerful stories. And some of those images that came out of Selma, and Birmingham, and Nashville, Montgomery and other

places around the South, have educated a whole generation. And people won't forget it. We used to take some of those images from Birmingham when I was in school at Nashville, put them on the bulletin board, and say, "See what happened in Birmingham." We have to continue to fight.

Professor Charlotte Grimes: Thank you so much. I get a little choked up here because I'm from Alabama, too. Seeing Congressman Lewis, who was then just John Lewis on Bloody Sunday when I was 15, was a transforming event in my life. Excuse me. We're going to bring this to a close now, and we couldn't have done better than with John Lewis. Before we end, I'd also like to tell you, Congressman Lewis said, sometimes folks in Congress don't listen to him. But there is one man who has listened to him recently, Senator John McCain, a Republican. In McCain's newest book, "Why Courage Matters," he has a whole chapter on John Lewis. This is what he said, and I hope that we can just use these as our parting thoughts. John McCain: "I've seen courage in action on many occasions. I can't say I've seen anyone possess more of it, and use it for any better purpose and to any greater effect, than John Lewis." Thank you, Congressman Lewis. And thank you for being with us.