

Author Bio

- Birth—February 21, 1940
- Where—Troy, Alabama, USA
- Education—American Baptist Theological Seminary, Fisk University
- Currently—lives in Atlanta, Georgia

Congressman John Lewis first joined the civil rights movement as a college student in Nashville, organizing sit-ins and participating in the first Freedom Rides. He soon became the chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and one of the “Big Six” national leaders of the movement, alongside such figures as Martin Luther King, Jr. and A. Philip Randolph.

He was the youngest speaker at the 1963 March on Washington and a leader of the 1965 Selma–Montgomery March (known as “Bloody Sunday”), where police brutality spurred national outrage and hastened passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. His subsequent career has included voter registration activism, service on the Atlanta City Council, and over 25 years in Congress.

Lewis received the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2011, and was the first recipient of the John F. Kennedy “Profile in Courage” Lifetime Achievement Award.

His 1998 book *Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement*, called “the definitive account of the civil rights movement” (*Washington Post*), won numerous honors, including the Robert F. Kennedy, Lillian Smith, and Anisfield-Wolf Book Awards, and was named “Top of the List” by the American Library Association’s *Booklist*.

His most recent book, *Across that Bridge: Life Lessons and a Vision for Change*, received the NAACP Image Award. (*From the publisher and Wikipedia. Retrieved 2/21/2014.*)

Summary

Volume one of *March*, a graphic novel trilogy co-authored by Congressman John Lewis (Georgia-5) and Andrew Aydin, with art by Nate Powell (a *New York Times* bestseller, Eisner Award winner, and finalist for the *LA Times* Book Prize).

March is a vivid, first-hand account of John Lewis' lifelong struggle for civil and human rights (including his key roles in the historic 1963 March on Washington and the 1965 Selma-Montgomery March), meditating in the modern age on the distance traveled since the days of Jim Crow and segregation.

In *March*, a true American icon teams up with one of America's most acclaimed graphic novelists. Together, they bring to life one of our nation's most historic moments, a period both shameful and inspiring, and a movement whose echoes will be heard for generations. (*From the publisher.*)

Discussion Questions

1. Why might this trilogy be entitled “March”? How many marches can you find depicted or mentioned in *March: Book One* (front and back covers, pp. 5–9, 19–20, 88, 90–91, 96, 110, 116, 117)? Analyze the multiple meanings, and connotations, of the word march with respect to the “how far we’ve come” theme (p. 19) that runs throughout the frame story. Specifically, how do the actions of Lewis and his comrades exemplify the defining characteristics of marching, such as being resolute, unified, and steady? If the word

is usually used to describe the movement of an army, what is the significance of nonviolent groups doing the same? Finally, how might John Lewis' line "We have to march," in response to the bombing of the Loobys' house (p. 116), signal the climax of the book?

2. How does nonviolent resistance as espoused by Gandhi, King, and Lawson (pp. 76–77) work to bring about social change, and how does it compare to other methods? Contrast the violence which opens the book with the emphasis on the "peaceful transition to power" in the 2009 television's broadcast (p. 14) and the similarly peaceful, largely silent pages (pp. 10–12) that precede it. What is the historical message implied by this contrast?

3. In what ways do Lewis's religious background and values influence his approach to the struggle for civil rights as well as the movement as a whole (e.g., pp. 8, 27–28, 56, 104)? Do you feel that love of one's attacker is a requirement for effective nonviolent resistance (p.82), and are there any signs of it in the book (p. 95)?

4. History is often considered to be made up of recorded facts. In contrast, what important role might subjective factors such "dreams" and "fate" play in history, according to *March*? Trace the theme of wishes, dreams, and the "spirit of history" during the course of the book (pp. 19, 25–26, 50, 73, 87, 113). When the alarm clock on page 13 goes off, in what ways might it signify the end of a nightmare, or the transition from a dream to a reality, in terms of national race relations? Does the inauguration of Barack Obama represent the complete fulfillment of Dr. King's dream, or merely a step?

5. The phrase "law and order" seems to imply that maintaining social order is an important function of police and other law enforcement authorities. But what happens when preserving the existing status quo makes such authorities the instigators of violence rather than those who protect citizens from it (pp. 6, 101)? How should individuals and groups respond when the justice system itself is bent to serve certain positions and interests (p. 107)?

6. What is the relationship between geography, community, and politics in *March*? As just one example, how does the isolation of the chickens in their henhouse reflect the isolation of Lewis's family on their farm (pp. 20–22, 28)? What visual elements help convey these ideas? Similarly, how does the trip to Buffalo, with its bright lights and vertical heights (p. 42) that mirror the scale of Lewis's aspirations for himself and society, illustrate his dawning sense of possibilities both figuratively and literally (as a Northern city free of the everyday prejudices of the South)? On the other hand, in what ways does the rural community of Alabama exemplify the notion of a tight-knit community despite being spread out geographically (pp. 58, 72)?

7. To practice a crucial skill when reading the memoir form, identify and analyze the "turning points" in John Lewis's life. Some of these the text's language highlights for us, as in "home never felt the same" (p. 66), Jim Lawson's words signaling a "way out" (p. 78) and "my first arrest" (p. 103). What would you add to such a group? For example, is the attempt to transfer to Troy State (p. 66) a turning point even if it does not work out? How do the authors use the visual layout of their pages to emphasize important moments and emotions (for example, by giving a large amount of space to a single image, up to a full page or "splash page")?

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10. What role did economic factors play in the process of desegregation? Specifically, if African Americans

had represented a far smaller part of the buying public, do you think tactics such as boycotts and sit-ins would have been as effective? (pp. 59, 83–84, 92–93, 96, 110) What example of economic freedom early in *March* may have inspired Lewis by providing a model of what racially integrated commerce looks like in practice (pp. 42-45)? 7

11. How do the events depicted in *March* connect to your life personally? Discuss with an older family member or friend their memories of the early 1960s and the civil rights movement. Alternatively, is there a modern-day issue for which you might be willing to take a stand? Would you use the same techniques as the Nashville Student Movement, or a different strategy? Has reading *March* changed your perspective, and if so, how?

(Questions issued by the publisher.)

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