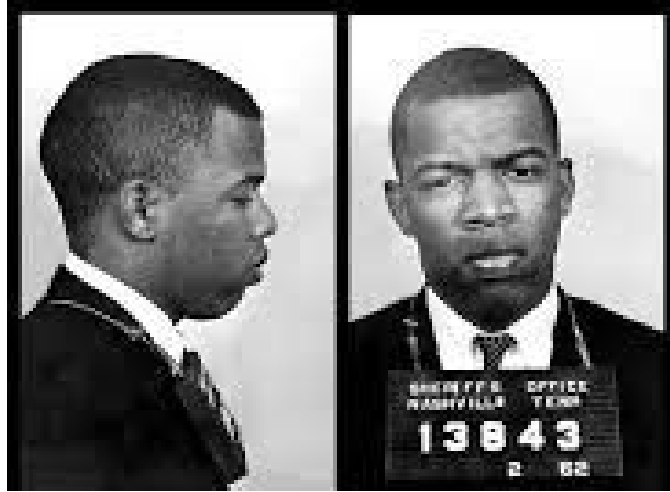




the
SNCC Legacy Project
Founded in 2010

Claiming **JOHN ROBERT LEWIS**



February 21, 1940 - July 17, 2020

“Do not get lost in a sea of despair. Be hopeful, be optimistic. Our struggle is not the struggle of a day, a week, a month, or a year, it is the struggle of a lifetime. Never, ever be afraid to make some noise and get in good trouble, necessary trouble.”

~ John Lewis, [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee \(SNCC\) Field Secretary 1960 to 1963 and Chairman 1963 to 1966.](#)

The best way to remember John Lewis is by looking around us today. For he is present in the young voices and bodies on the front lines of what has been a centuries'-long struggle for justice and human rights. His life story reflects courage, commitment, and an unshakable belief that the best of humankind's potential is possible. But he always made clear, you have to fight for it. Speaking to young people he often challenged them: ***“If you see something that's not right, not fair, not just, do something about it. Say something. Do something. Have the courage. Have the backbone to get in the way.”***



He was a son of the South, and we could easily tick off a list of his heroics in the face of the awful terrorism used to protect white supremacy in that region. Sometimes we in SNCC were awed by his bravery, as we were by the bravery of many of those around us from [Fannie Lou Hamer](#) to [Amzie Moore](#) to [Ella Baker](#) and countless others. For none of us in the Movement stood alone. We were all part of a larger community of those who had long struggled for justice, some before we were born. Beyond that, John was also a son of America, well aware of its flaws, particularly with regard to racial inequities. He was always challenging the shortcomings that prevented this country from achieving its promise.

He believed that Black lives mattered and struggled to make this so.

It is this that links the life of John Lewis to today's continuing struggle, led by the movement for Black lives. Do not think then, of John Lewis the icon, or John Lewis the congressman, or even John Lewis "the legend," but rather, of the John Lewis who almost from childhood was always willing to "get in the way" of wrong.

His parents were sharecroppers and he grew up on a small farm in rural Alabama; so in following his life, we are forced to consider the potential power of ordinary people who decide to stand up, speak for themselves, and fight for what is right. Like those who worked with us in the 1960s, these are the people who compose today's movement and are in part enabled by the earlier work of John Lewis and others.

We know that John saw an important part of himself in the movement that is now unfolding, even when he disagreed with them as he sometimes did; just as [Martin Luther King, Jr.](#) saw part of himself in SNCC and sometimes disagreed with us, too. John joined the board of King's organization, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) in 1962. In this we find another lesson of John's life: While organized effort is necessary, organizations come, go, transform themselves, and leave legacies. What really counts is a life-long commitment to work with others to build a more just world.



Clearer now more than ever, the great lesson of John's life is that we need to take on the unfinished business of change. There is urgency to this and we could sometimes hear it in John's voice. There is a reason thousands of mostly young people have been in the streets for months. There is a reason to listen to them; John understood that and welcomed it. Let that not be lost.

OFFICERS

Courtland Cox, Chair
Robert "Bob" Moses, Vice Chair
Larry Rubin, Treasurer
Cynthia G. Palmer, Secretary

Bruce Hartford
Timothy Jenkins
Sharlene Kranz
Joyce Ladner
Maisha Moses
Judy Richardson
Betty Garman Robinson
Cleveland Sellers
Zoharah Simmons
Frank Smith

Karen Spellman
Maria Varela

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS

Jamil Al-Amin
Phil Hutchings

BOARD MEMBERS

Geri Augusto
Charlie Cobb

EMERITUS MEMBERS

Bernice Johnson Reagon
Charles Sherrod

Keep up to date with the SNCC Legacy Project:

SNCC Digital Gateway - www.snccdigital.org

SNCC Legacy Project email - info@sccclegacyproject.org

SNCC Legacy Project website - www.sccclegacyproject.org

**Join us in 2021 for the
SNCC 60TH ANNIVERSARY CONVENING
Washington, DC
June 3 - 5, 2021
To register, click [here](#)**